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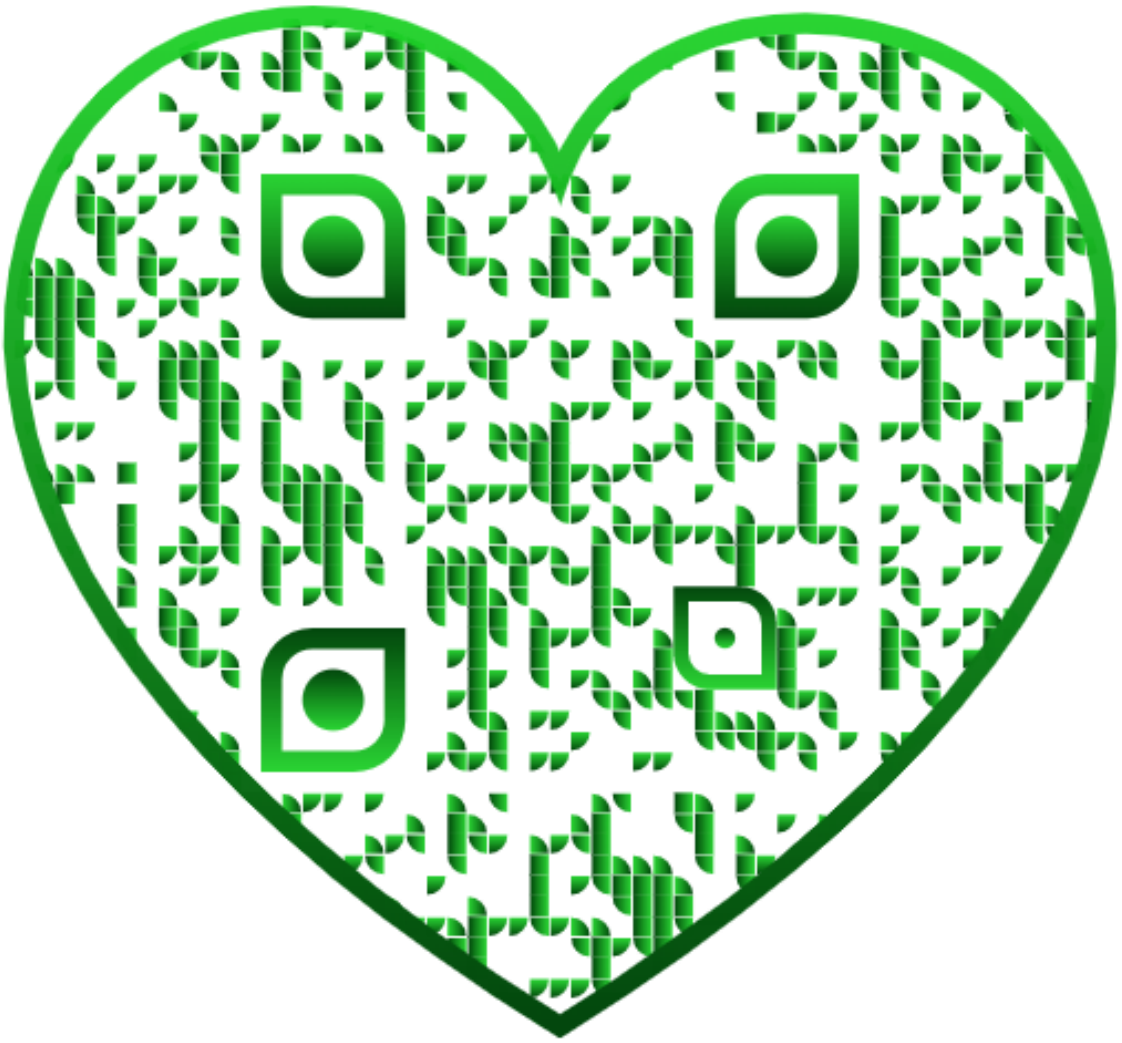

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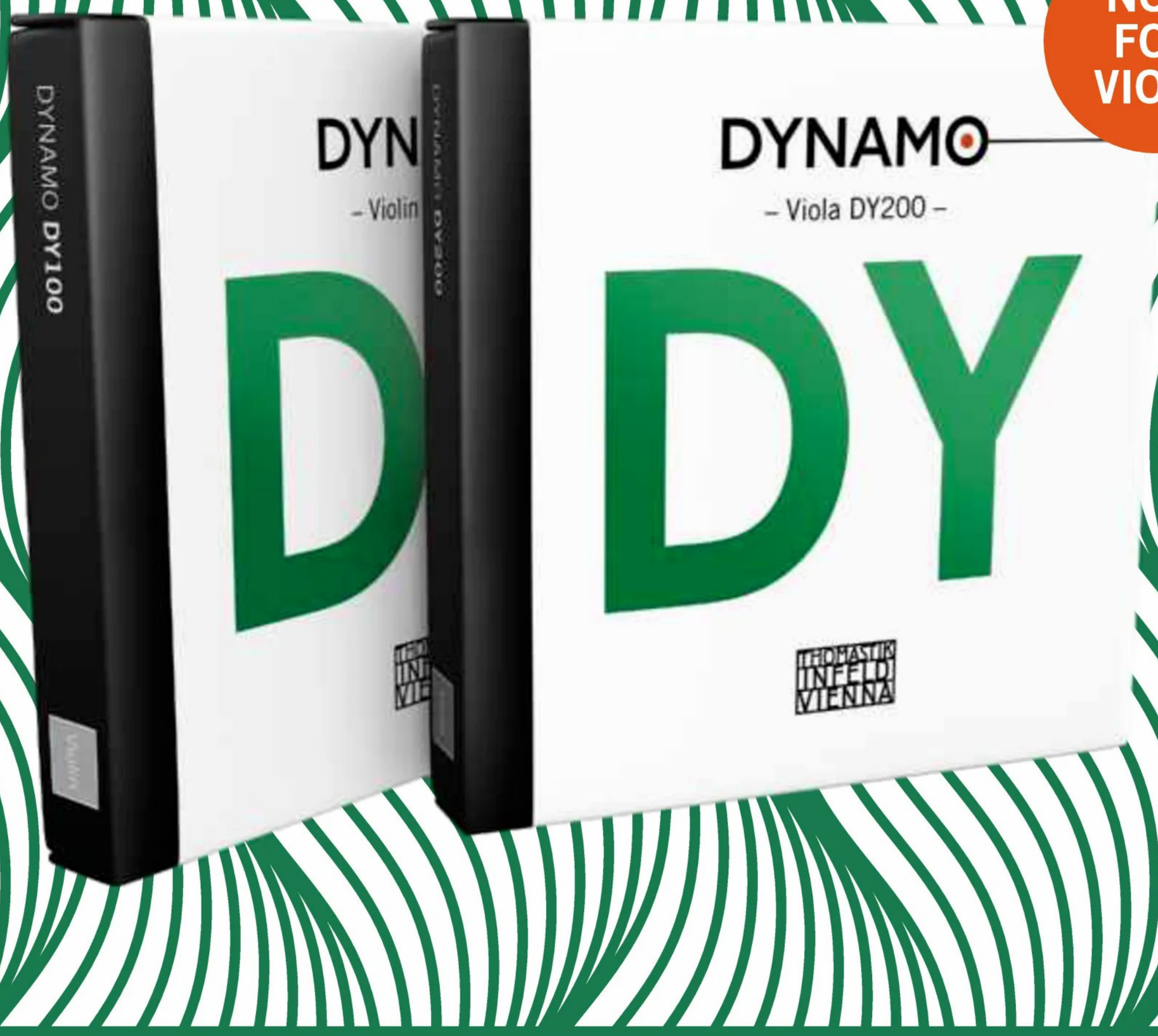

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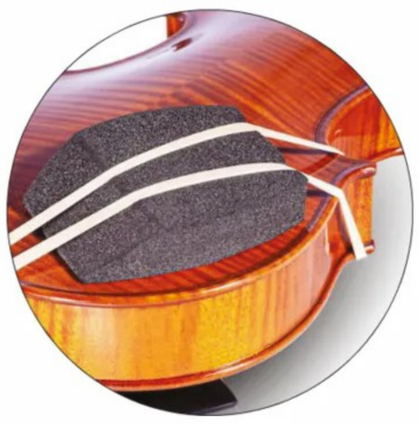

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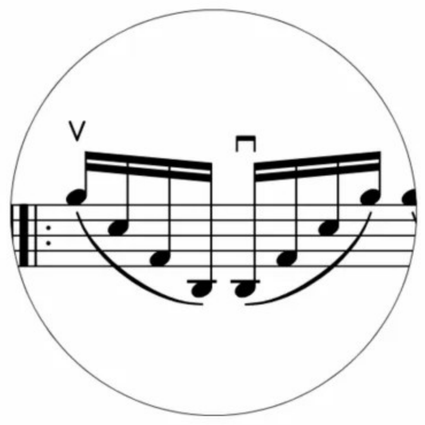

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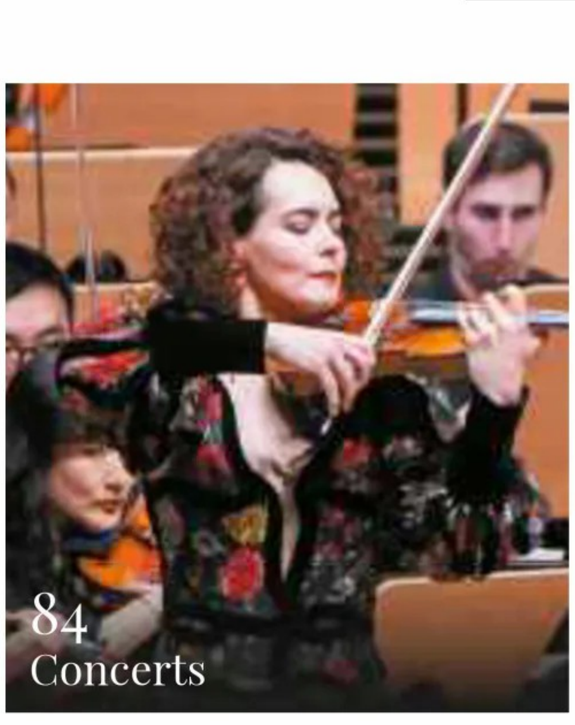

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Editor's letter

The British viola tradition is synonymous with Lionel Tertis, the virtuoso who revolutionised not just the repertoire but the size and shape of the instruments that many modern violists favour. The latest in the line of British violists to take on his mantle is Timothy Ridout, who, at not yet 30, is already one of the most promising soloists of his generation, a musician with a distinctive sound and remarkable expressive strength. On page 26 he speaks to fellow violist Toby Deller about his personal quest to expand the viola's repertoire, as well as his unusual instrument, a 16th-century Peregrino di Zanetto, and his latest recording, which celebrates the legacy of Tertis himself.

Back in 2018, *The Strad* reported on violinist Philippe Graffin's discovery of a previously unknown sonata by Eugène Ysaÿe, which had been buried in the archives of the Brussels Conservatoire. Now Graffin has done it again, in collaboration with French musicologist Xavier Falques, unearthing an unpublished Ysaÿe work for violin and orchestra, the *Poème concertant*. The Belgian virtuoso wrote the piece (the closest thing to a violin concerto by Ysaÿe that we are every likely to hear) as a love letter to the much younger violinist Irma Sèthe, for whom he'd developed a hopeless passion. On page 34 Graffin speaks to Jessica Duchen about the origins of the work, the creation of a modern performing score, and the world premiere recording which is released, appropriately enough, in time for Valentine's Day.

For more than 300 years, Schönbach, a small town in what was once Bohemia, has been a hub of violin making. Much of this tradition can be traced back to one man, Elias Placht, who arrived in Schönbach in 1721 and began a family business that sparked a lutherie dynasty that spread all over the region. On page 56 Christian Hoyer explores the Placht family legacy, and opens a seam of research that still raises plenty of questions.

Emma Baker editor
Email me at **thestrad@thestrad.com** or tweet **@TheStradMag**

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Cover photo Jiyang Chen

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Contributors

CHRISTIAN BAYON

(Making Matters, page 72)

is a French violin maker based in Lisbon, Portugal. Since 2003 he has devoted himself to making violins, violas and cellos. He has been a member of the International Society of Violin and Bow Makers since 1997.

JOHN DILWORTH

(In Focus, page 63)

is a British luthier who has been writing articles on instruments and violin making for *The Strad* for more than 30 years. His work has also been published in books and journals worldwide.

CHRISTIAN HOYER

(Elias Placht, page 56)

studied history and politics in Marburg, London, Keele and Erlangen. He comes from a family of violin and bow makers and is deputy director of the city museum and city archive in Herzogenaurach. In Bubenreuth he works on the board of the museum association.

DANIEL KURGANOV

(Masterclass, page 74)

is a Boston-based violinist steeped in the nuances of violin playing from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Trained in Zurich by a Heifetz protégé, he is equally dedicated to education, leading workshops globally, and running a widely followed YouTube channel on the craft.

KATHARINA NEUMÜLLER

(Trade Secrets, page 66)

trained at the Mittenwald School of Violin Making and opened her own workshop in Lenggries, south of Munich, in 2013. She specialises in making new violins, violas and cellos, as well as child-size violins and violas.

SIMON ROWLAND-JONES

(Technique, page 80)

is a performer, editor, composer and teacher, also known for his viola transcriptions of Bach and as editor of the new Peters Urtext Edition of the Haydn String Quartets. He is increasingly occupied with composing and is joint director of the North Norfolk Music Festival.

the Strad

EDITORIAL Editor **Emma Baker** Managing Editor **Christian Lloyd** Reviews Editor **Harriet Smith**
Online Editor **Davina Shum** Staff Writer **Rita Fernandes** Sub-editor **Marija Đurić Speare**
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SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES Tel +44 208 955 7005 email customerservices@thestrad.com

EDITORIAL ENQUIRIES The Strad, Newsquest Media Group Ltd, 4th Floor, Queens House, 55–56 Lincoln's Inn Fields, London WC2A 3LJ, UK
Tel +44 20 7618 3095 thestrad@thestrad.com
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Stradivarius (1716). Il Cannone Gold. Original image credit: Leilei Ma.

LARSEN STRINGS

A c.1820–25 Tourte bow, now owned and played by Anne Akiko Meyers

LETTER of the MONTH

WELL TOURTE

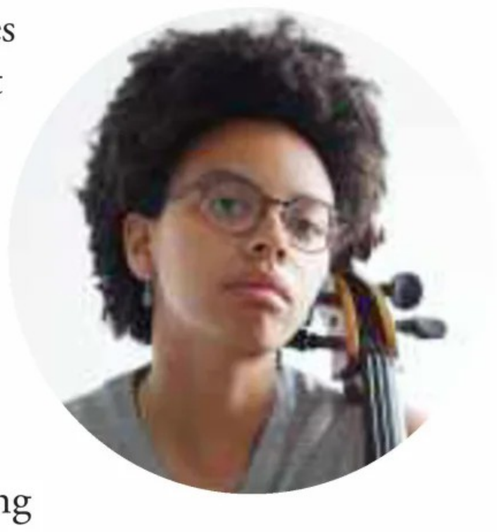
We are most grateful for Philip Kass's very positive review, in *The Strad*'s December 2023 issue, of our new book *Tourte*. We would like to take a moment to clarify and amplify one issue that Kass raised in Gabriel Schaff's biography of François Xavier Tourte. Kass writes 'it is disappointing not to find evidence of the supposed connection between Tourte and Viotti,' referring to the commonly held and oft-repeated notion (promulgated first by François-Joseph Fétis in 1856 and endlessly repeated thereafter) that Viotti's 1782 arrival in Paris played a causal role in the emergence of the final form of Tourte's 'modern' bow.

To be clear, what our book does is debunk this myth completely. Granted, it is not difficult to imagine that Viotti was acquainted with one or both of the Tourte brothers as well as with the other Parisian makers active between 1782 and 1792, the years he spent in Paris. However, no document from that time has yet been found to establish a working relationship between the two giants, nor is there any documented evidence of Viotti's use of a Tourte bow. The closest allusion, as presented in Schaff's text, is an isolated reference from December 1821, very late in both Viotti's and Tourte's lives, that Viotti was asked to be involved in a sale of Tourte bows. Viotti never wrote directly about bows nor spoke of them in any documented conversations. Most importantly, we believe that our book clearly establishes the emergence of Tourte's 'modern' bow several years prior to Viotti's 1782 arrival in Paris. This assertion is supported by the physical evidence of bows made by Tourte and shown in our book.

We would rejoice in the finding of any information that sheds new light on our hero Tourte, but it would almost certainly be something discovered by accident, or at some point in the future when new information comes to light, as the presently known archives have been deeply plumbed. Schaff's text aims to dispel the ingrained assumptions borne from incomplete research and fanciful conflations of earlier eras.

PAUL CHILDS
Montrose, NY, US
GABRIEL SCHAFF
Harrington Park, NJ, US

IMPROVISE TO IMPROVE



SEALES PHOTO SIMONE SEALES. BOW PHOTOS COURTESY PAUL CHILDS

The Opinion piece by Simone Seales (*right*) on improvisation ('Imperfect is OK', December 2023) is well considered. I have been playing improvised music (jazz, rock, blues, bluegrass) for over 60 years now. I did not have the means when young to pursue a formal education in music, and in fact originally learnt to play by sitting in music stores and playing the instruments when the owners allowed me access. The advent of a multiplicity of 'how-to' books over the past 40 years has provided me with great access to the musical theory, technique and knowledge needed to bring my playing to a higher level.

I still cannot sightread, but have to struggle note by note when I learn a composed piece. But I rarely need to do that, as my knowledge of chords and scales lets me play most popular music based only on the chords or the key. Nevertheless, I miss not being able to play the vast array of composed music that is available.

As limited as I am, in my experience many musicians who are well trained in the formalities of music and technique are just as limited in not being able to play something unless it is written down in standard notation. I have always thought well-trained musicians were missing out on some of the best uses of their formidable technique by not knowing how to improvise.

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS

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Improvisation can open up your understanding of what a composed piece is really about. Playing around with the chords and scales a composer uses can give one great insights into the piece, and perhaps spark a moment of genius that springs from your fingers. And it can also give one a certain satisfaction and feeling of accomplishment that is different – perhaps more personal – than finely playing a composed piece.

Why limit yourself to one aspect, even a multifaceted one like classical training? Venture forth into unexplored worlds and you may discover anew a joy and enthusiasm that perhaps has become a bit dulled by too much focus on hours of practice to perfect one's technique.

ED EINOWSKI
Portland, OR, US

A SWEET SURPRISE

I enjoyed the vintage account, from 1903, of the early life of Franz Joseph Haydn right up to his engagement at the court of Prince Esterházy (From the Archive, September 2023). While on holiday in Budapest in December, I was introduced to the delights of 'Esterházy torte', a delicious confection of almond meringue, icing and brandy which succeeding in warming me through, amid the freezing weather. Further research revealed that it was named after Paul III Anton, Prince Esterházy, son of Haydn's patron Nikolaus II. I'd be honoured to introduce it to readers of *The Strad*; me, who used to think the only Hungarian dessert I'd heard of was the 'jelly d'arányi'.

JOYCE GREEN
Bransholme, UK

ONLINE COMMENT

In November's Making Matters, Chris Sandvoss gave violists tips on how to find the best-fitting instrument. Our violist readers were eager to share their own experiences of dealing with this conundrum bitly.ws/32VRn

KIMBERLY JOHNSON I just made the difficult decision to downsize from a 41.275cm viola to a 40cm. My shoulder just can't handle the bigger size any more. I miss my bigger viola but I don't regret the decision to leave it.

ILANA TAPPER I had a 15¼-inch viola made for me last year, modelled on the viola I was borrowing previously, and I love it!

DAVID SWISS I think that the five-string will become the default instrument for most violin and viola players.

DERHOVSEPIAN PHOTO ERIC ARBITER.JPG

www.thestrad.com TOP 3 ONLINE POSTS

1 Houston Symphony appoints Joan DerHovsepian (*below*) as principal violist bitly.ws/32VL4

2 Missing: violin worth €30,000 stolen at Amsterdam Central train station bitly.ws/32VLm

3 'Music must be played, life must go on': an update from Ukrainian violin maker Orest Putsentela bitly.ws/36z6Y

PODCAST OF THE MONTH

the Strad PODCAST

Episode #105: Active string teaching and learning with violinist Mahaliah Edwards bitly.ws/36qia

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On the beat

News and events from around the world this month

Read all the breaking news in the string world online www.thestrad.com

Target practice

With dwindling numbers of people training to be music teachers in England, what can be done to encourage more interest in the music education sector?

By Peter Somerford

The UK government claims to be 'committed to high-quality music education for every child'

The under-recruitment of trainee secondary school music teachers in England has hit a new low. Figures published by the Department for Education (DfE) in December 2023 show that the government reached just 27 per cent of its initial teacher training target for music in the 2023–24 academic year, recruiting 216 trainees against a target of 790. The DfE has only once met its annual target for music in the past ten years, and that was in the Covid year of 2020–21. Until now, the lowest figure reached was 64 per cent in 2022–23. In an attempt to stem the decline, the government is reintroducing a bursary for trainee secondary music teachers in 2024–25, which will be worth £10,000. While this move has been welcomed by music education experts and campaigners, they say more needs to be done to address teachers' working conditions, the lack of teacher training provision in some areas of the country, and the undervaluing of music as an academic subject.

The current recruitment situation is a far cry from 2010–11, when the DfE's music target of 570 was comfortably exceeded. The government then reduced the target to 390 for 2011–12; Dr Alison Daubney, an honorary senior lecturer in education at the University of Sussex and co-editor of the *British Journal of Music Education*, says this marked a clear shift in policy and priorities. 'If you under-recruit, and then carry on under-recruiting by hundreds of teachers a year, it diminishes the status of the subject,' she says. 'And it means that the pool of teachers able to apply for jobs gets ever smaller. Every time you squeeze this pool, you also make it more exclusive, so it becomes more difficult to get people into the classroom who represent the communities they are teaching.' With decreasing numbers of trainees and a government shift towards school-led models of teacher training, many university training courses have closed, notes Daubney. On top of this, a government 'market review' of initial teacher training in 2021 led to some highly rated providers losing their official accreditation. Daubney says: 'We have black holes in the country – big geographical areas where there is little or no access to music teacher training.'

Another policy shift in 2010 was the introduction of the English Baccalaureate, a secondary school accountability measure that the Independent Society of Musicians (ISM) and other campaigning organisations have decried for marginalising music and other creative subjects. ISM chief executive Deborah Annetts says: 'If music is being squeezed out of schools as a subject, musicians will question why they should consider training to be a music

GETTY/SERNOVIK

‘We have black holes in the country – big areas where there is little or no access to music teacher training’ – *Dr Alison Daubney, co-editor, British Journal of Music Education*

teacher. The DfE has also wanted to increase its control of how teachers teach, taking away a sense of autonomy. When you have teachers not being treated well as professionals, and you combine this with the long hours, workload pressures and the lack of funding in schools, it makes for a rather demoralising situation.’

Catherine Barker, chair of the Music Teachers Association and head of music and performing arts at schools group United Learning, says there is some cause for optimism with more teaching job opportunities opening up around the country, even though the pool of potential recruits is smaller. ‘Following the 2022 publication of the refreshed National Plan for Music Education and the increased focus from Ofsted [the national schools inspectorate] on the importance of breadth of curriculum, schools are looking to address their music provision,’ she says. ‘So schools that, for example, have only a limited amount of music every year in a carousel programme rather than a full weekly provision, are seeking to address this. And this means that schools are recruiting.’ Daubney sees undergraduate music courses as increasingly doing more to prepare students for teaching as a part of what they will realistically go on to do, and notes that classroom teaching is also something professional musicians can come to later in life. There is flexibility, too, in the training routes for secondary school music teachers, says Barker: ‘Doing a university-based postgraduate certificate in education isn’t the only route into classroom teaching. There are school-centred initial teacher training courses and there are also salaried training positions.’

The reintroduction of the training bursary for music should address some of the financial concerns of young graduates who are coming off the back of a four-year performance degree, as well as experienced musicians considering a career change. But how much is teacher pay, frequently seen as sector-wide retention issue, a factor for those musicians? Barker says: ‘If freelance musicians move into the classroom and stay there, they are a lot more financially secure than they would be working in the music industry. Teaching is a profession with genuine progression possibilities.’

A DfE spokesperson says: ‘We remain committed to high-quality music education for every child, which is why the government now expects schools to teach music for at least an hour a week from ages 5 to 14, give pupils opportunities to sing and play an instrument, and establish choirs and ensembles. We have introduced a range of initiatives to boost recruitment in key subjects, including introducing a bursary for music teachers. There are now record numbers of teachers in our schools, up by 27,000 or six per cent since 2010.’

NIK BABIC

NEWS IN BRIEF

Emily Sun loaned the ‘Adelaide’ Guadagnini violin bit.ly/48gGk1X

Australian violinist Emily Sun (*left*) has been named the latest custodian of the ‘Adelaide’ violin, made by Giovanni Battista Guadagnini in Milan between 1753 and 1757. Currently held in trust by the Ukaria foundation, the instrument was purchased by the people of South Australia in 1955 and is valued at over $1 million. ‘This Guadagnini has a “golden” sound,’ Sun said.

Trio Pantoum announces new member bit.ly/48DWEtq

Trio Pantoum has announced that pianist Kojiro Okada will be joining current members violinist Hugo Meder and cellist Bogeun Park. Okada succeeds Virgile Roche, who leaves after seven years with the trio to pursue other opportunities. ‘Kojiro brings us an energy, creativity and joy that we look forward to sharing with you at our upcoming concerts,’ the group said in a statement.

Novo Quartet wins €68,000 grant from the Danish Arts Foundation bit.ly/41GnWwU

The Novo Quartet has been selected by the Danish Arts Foundation for its Young Artistic Elite programme from 2024 to 2026. The quartet receives a grant worth €68,000 which will allow it to embark on new projects, expand its ideas and share its work globally. The quartet will work with project consultant and cellist Jacob Shaw to map out a two-year career plan. ‘This marks a monumental milestone for our quartet, and we’re eager for what lies ahead,’ the quartet said on social media.

Do you have a topical story concerning the string music world? Email us at **thestrad@thestrad.com**

OBITUARIES

CONRAD VON DER GOLTZ

Violinist Conrad von der Goltz, a concertmaster with numerous orchestras and a champion of youth music education, died on 21 November 2023. He was 95.

Von der Goltz was born in Berlin in 1928 and lived in Sweden during the Second World War. From 1948 he studied first in Hamburg and then in Detmold with Tibor Varga, and took part in masterclasses with Max Rostal and Wolfgang Schneiderhan.

A host of concertmaster positions followed his studies, including at Göttingen, the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, first concertmaster at the Bremen Philharmonic State Orchestra and as a guest at the SWR Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden.

As an educator, von der Goltz became professor at the Würzburg University of Music in 1963, a post he held until 1993. He was also professor of violin at the University of Catholic Church Music and Music Education in Regensburg. He received a Federal Cross of Merit for his work in music education.

Von der Goltz was also a member of the Brahms Trio with his pianist wife Kirsti Hjort and cellist Jan Polasek, as well as the German-English Mozart Ensemble and the Von der Goltz Chamber Orchestra.

JÁNOS ROLLA

Hungarian violinist János Rolla died on 7 December 2023 at the age of 79. He was a founding member of the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra in 1963, holding the role of concertmaster for over 50 years, as well as artistic director from 1979 until his retirement.

Born in 1944 in Kőtelk, Rolla was a student of Mária Zipernovszky at the Bartók Conservatory from 1957 to 1962, and studied at the Liszt Academy of Music in the class of Dénes Kovács from 1962 and 1968. He played in the Hungarian Radio and Television Symphony Orchestra between 1967 and 1974.

Rolla made more than 200 recordings with the Liszt Chamber Orchestra, and performed with the ensemble and numerous festivals worldwide. On the 20th anniversary of the ensemble's founding in 1983, Rolla and his fellow musicians received a memorial plaque marking the sale of a million recordings. In 1992 the French government made him a Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters.

Rolla joined the teaching staff at Budapest's Liszt Academy of Music in 2008 after receiving an honorary teaching title from the school in the previous year. From 2008 to 2011 he was head of the chamber music department.

PETRU MUNTEANU

Romanian violinist and pedagogue Petru Munteanu died on 17 November 2023 at the age of 83. He was known for initiating the International Violin Competition and International Master Classes for strings in Kloster Schöntal, where he was artistic director. He also served as the artistic director of the Leopold Mozart competition in Augsburg.

Born on 26 June 1940 in Bucharest, Munteanu pursued his studies there under professor George Manoliu. He went on to teach violin at the Bucharest Conservatoire, the University of Lübeck, the Hochschule für Musik in Hamburg and the University of Music and Drama Rostock. From 2000 to 2004 he was president of the German section of the European String Teachers Association.

Munteanu served as a jury member at many international competitions including the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, the Premio Paganini Competition in Genoa, the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels, the Enescu Competition in Bucharest, the Wieniawski Competition in Poznań and the Bach competition in Leipzig. He was also honoured for his achievements as an honorary professor at the University of Brasov and was awarded the highest medal of the Republic of Lithuania.

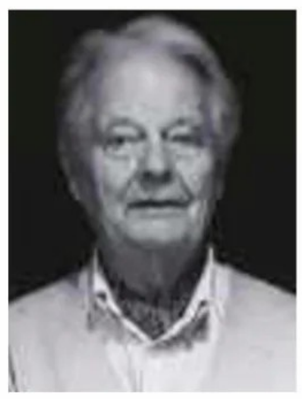
LUTZ RATH

The German-born US cellist Ludwig (Lutz) Rath died on 7 November 2023 at the age of 78. He had been artistic director of New York's Washington Square Music Festival since 2001.

Rath was born in 1945 in Krefeld, Germany. He received a master of arts from the Hochschule für Musik in Munich. He immigrated to the US where he studied with János Starker at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music from 1972 to 1974. Following his studies, he lived in New York City and Sag Harbor, NY.

Rath performed as cellist of the International String Quartet, principal cellist of the Munich Philharmonic and principal cellist of Orchestra of St Luke's. As a teacher he served on the faculties at Brown University, University of Indiana (Bloomington) and Bennington College.

In its tribute on social media, the Washington Square festival posted that Rath was 'well known on the local and international music scene' and that 'his knowledge of classical, contemporary and world music was exhaustive, which he enthusiastically shared with our audiences'. The festival dedicated its concert on Sunday 19 November to Rath.



JACQUES GHESTEM

The French violinist Jacques Ghestem died on 10 November 2023 at the age of 90. A prolific chamber and ensemble player, he was second violinist of the Parrenin Quartet from 1970 to 1980 and taught at the Conservatoire de Paris.

Ghestem was a member of Ensemble Intercontemporain and Ensemble Alterance. He was the author of the method book *Approach to Contemporary Music on the Violin*, in which he used the works of ten contemporary French composers to describe and explain various techniques and their execution.

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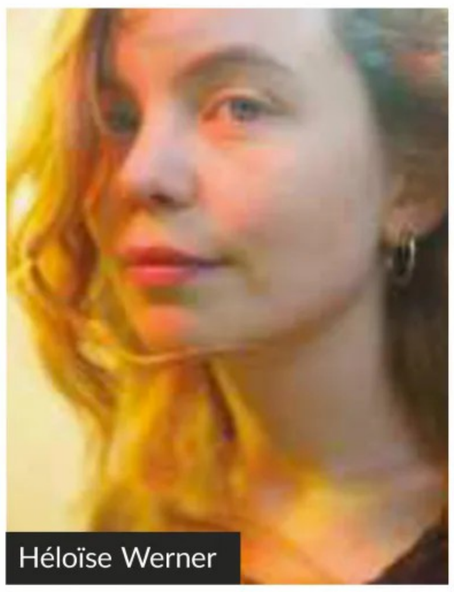
BEAUTY FROM BROKENNESS: Rather than allowing these battered old violins to be thrown away, US artist Alicia Clare has used them as a canvas for her creativity. The self-described 'colour-obsessed badass misfit rebel' creates her artworks at Sunshine Studios, her atelier in New York. More of her creations can be viewed on her Instagram page at @sunshinestudios77 which also includes timelapse videos of the making process. Photos: Alicia Clare

PREMIERE *of the* MONTH

People watching

Four personalities take centre stage in this new duet

COMPOSER **Héloïse Werner**
WORK ***close-ups***
ARTIST **Héloïse Werner (sop) Hae-Sun Kang (vn)**
DATE **6 February 2024**
PLACE **Maison de la Radio et de la Musique, Paris, France** bitly.ws/36qH5



Héloïse Werner

Hae-Sun Kang

In *close-ups*, French–British composer Héloïse Werner's new twelve-minute work for soprano and violin, we encounter four characters. 'I love watching people's behaviours and mannerisms,' Werner says about how she came to choose them. The personalities brought to life by the voice and violin are an overly keen person, a posh and pompous British gentleman, a frustratingly negative character (Werner had in mind an infuriating admin worker), and a laid-back personality.

First the characters' distinct motifs are introduced. For the keen person, the violin plays fast glissandos on the G string. For the admin character, there are 'really boring motifs that are just repeated'. The posh character is represented by deliberately bad violin playing. 'It's as if they think they're amazing, but it's just awful!' And the laid-back personality is depicted by a jazzy riff in 5/8 and 7/8 time. Each character's entrance is signalled with a distinct sound: an egg shaker, book slam, bell ring and an energetic 'hey'; for the laid-back, admin, posh and keen characters respectively. The characters' interjections gradually shorten as the piece goes on, with the soprano line becoming more and more intense, until we are only left with their corresponding sounds. Song-like moments are dotted throughout the piece. The libretto, which was written by Werner's sister Emma Werner, and is in both French and English, repeats the idea that you 'don't need a lot of words to bring a character to life'. It references the fact that the rest of the piece contains no words, only sounds.

The violin and voice are written as equals. Through different musical motifs they express similar feelings. As she will be singing in the performance, Werner explains that she enjoys the flexibility of the violin physically on stage, which allows her to be close to the player. 'I'm really looking forward to doing it in front of an audience,' she says. 'Because, after all, the piece is about people.'

WERNER PHOTO RAPHAEL NEAL. KANG PHOTO FRANCK FERVILLE

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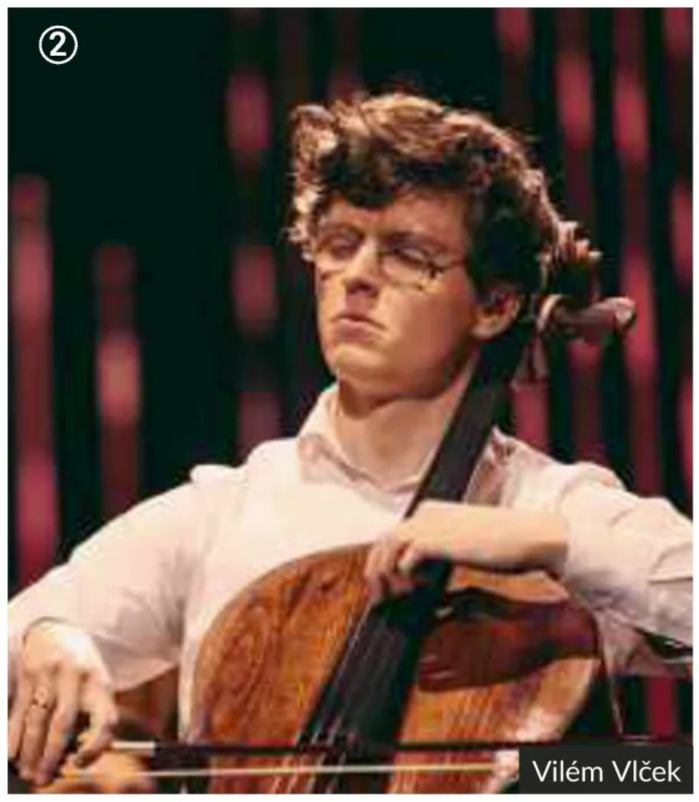
COMPETITIONS

Bohdan Luts


Vilém Vlček

Trio Basilea

❶ Ukrainian violinist **Bohdan Luts**, 19, has won first prize and €35,000 at the **Long-Thibaud International Competition** in Paris. He also won the audience prize, press jury prize and the prize of the French Republican Guard Orchestra. Luts is a student of the International Menuhin Music Academy. Second prize and €20,000 went to South Korean violinist Dayoon You, 22, while the €12,000 third prize went to 18-year-old Japanese violinist Koshiro Takeuchi.

❷ Czech cellist **Vilém Vlček**, 25, has received the PLN80,000 (£16,000) first prize at the **International Krzysztof Penderecki Cello Competition** in Kraków, Poland, as well as the prize for the best concerto performance. He is currently studying at the Basel Academy of Music in Switzerland. Second prize of PLN20,000 went to 19-year-old South Korean cellist Sang Hyeok Park, while the third prize of PLN20,000 was awarded to Italian cellist Maria Salvatori, also 19.

❸ **Trio Basilea** has won first prize at the **Swiss Chamber Music Competition** in Lucerne, Switzerland, receiving CHF5,000 (£4,500) and the opportunity to commission a work. The trio comprises French violinist Laurențiu Stoian, 21, Brazilian cellist Marina Martins, 24, and Swiss pianist Zofia Grzelak, 25. Trio Zarathoustra took the second prize of CHF3,000, and third prize of CHF2,000 went to Trio Archai.

❹ Polish violinist **Karolina Podorska**, 24, has won the inaugural **Karol Lipiński International Violin Competition** in Wrocław, Poland, winning PLN18,000 (£3,600) and further performance engagements. The PLN12,000 second prize was awarded to Polish violinist Barbara Żołnierczyk, 23, and third prize of PLN8,000 went to Polish violinist Milena Pioruńska, 18.

FORTHCOMING COMPETITIONS & AWARDS

Fischoff Chamber Music Competition in South Bend, IN, US, for chamber music groups of three to six players aged 35 or under. First prize $15,000. **Deadline** 21 February; competition 10–12 May **Web** fischoff.org

ARD Music Competition in Munich, Germany, for cellists aged 15–29. First prize €10,000. **Deadline** 28 March; competition 7–15 September **Web** br.de/ard-music-competition

Starker Foundation Competition online, for cellists aged under 30. First prize $35,000. **Deadline** 1 April; competition 1 October **Web** starkerfoundation.org

APPOINTMENTS

- Dutch violinist **Janine Jansen** began as professor of violin at the Kronberg Academy in November 2023
- The Maggini Quartet has announced the British cellist **Will Schofield** is to be its newest member
- Violinist **Clémence de Forceville** has been named first concertmaster of the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra
- US violin maker **Sanghoon Lee** has been announced as the Violin Making School of America's new owner, director, and head instructor

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LUTS PHOTO TAM LAN TRUONG. VLČEK PHOTO PIOTR MARKOWSKI PHOTOGRAPHY. TRIO PHOTO ANASTASIIA GROMOVA

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'My idea was to give the cases personality,' says Andreas Kolar, maker of the XO Stringcase for violin, whose background is in fashion design. The new cases have eight different designs, while their internal constructions are identical. They are made of expanded polypropylene, a type of granulated foam which is expanded with steam. The company produced bespoke tools in order to use the material. 'The resulting foam is very strong and stable. About 80 per cent of it is air and it is very light,' says Kolar. Depending on the exterior design, the cases range from 1.6 to 1.8kg.

The top and bottom of the case's interior are moulded to fit the violin. The instrument is secured in three places: at the chin rest, at the bridge and along the fingerboard. Carbon-fibre plates are also placed within the foam on either side of the bridge to reinforce the sensitive area. 'The foam is a very good insulator for temperature and humidity,' says Kolar. 'And the waste is non-toxic.' The case features a leather handle, three bow holders, an external sheet music pocket and a silky red instrument cover.

The shape of the case follows the contour of the violin, and Kolar suggests the shape 'has movement', likening it to a flame or sail. The exterior is made of a lightweight and water-resistant technical textile, which is used for bags by high-street fashion brands. The eight designs range from solid brown, black, blue and silver, to camouflage patterns and a scratched-leather aesthetic. 'They're not just different colours; the designs are for different tastes,' says Kolar. 'Maybe it matches what the person wears, or their hair colour. I don't want it to be just a tool to carry your instrument, but a companion.'

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Life lessons

Johannes Pramsohler

The Italian violinist on his journey to becoming a Baroque specialist and the benefits of having a range of influences

I was lucky to have basically grown up in a music school as my father was the director of one in our home town. My brothers and I were there every day. It was great, but it also meant that out of fear of seeming nepotistic, our dad would often give us the new, less experienced teachers! So mine changed a lot during that time. My experience of music back then was very joyful, but in some ways I had to be tamed. It was Georg Egger, my teacher in Bolzano, who helped me with that. I was with him for seven years and he really sorted me out technically. Something I only realised afterwards, when I got to London, was how important it is to be your own teacher. With Georg I was always hoping that he would do what I had to do. In London, when I studied at the Guildhall School, everything was so fast-paced that it became essential to build my own approach to music.

Although I came to London to study modern violin, it was there that I discovered my love for Baroque violin. And I've never looked back! Rachel Podger was a huge influence on me, and I kept on my lessons with her for two years after I left London to go to France. My teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, Patrick Bismuth, was wild and we disagreed on so many things, but it was formative in pushing me to the limits, both technically and musically. Rachel encouraged me to see as many different teachers as possible, and it was good for me to spend those two years travelling around and meeting everyone I could. I think it is vital to have as many influences as you can, especially in the Baroque world where there are so many schools of thought.

I would also recommend travelling a lot as a musician, playing in different countries and with various groups. All those cultures will have their own ways of rehearsing and speaking about music. There was always a mystery around Baroque playing in France, as if it was a little untouchable. But now that I have lived there for so long, I feel I have become somewhat authorised to play French music in my own way!

For young musicians wanting to specialise in Baroque playing, my one piece of advice is to keep playing the modern violin and also immerse yourself deeply in 17th-century music. I think the time of specialisation is over, and you now see excellent modern players who perform 18th-century music so well. It's about understanding the style, no matter the instrument you play on. But we need to know where it all came from. That's why it's important to get familiar with the music before Bach, Vivaldi and Corelli. The main thing is always to have in mind how you want to sound, what the piece you are playing means to you, and why you are playing it.

I think the time of specialisation is over

(*l–r*) Ten-year-old Johannes Pramsohler, his mother and his brother playing chamber music together at Christmas

INTERVIEW BY RITA FERNANDES

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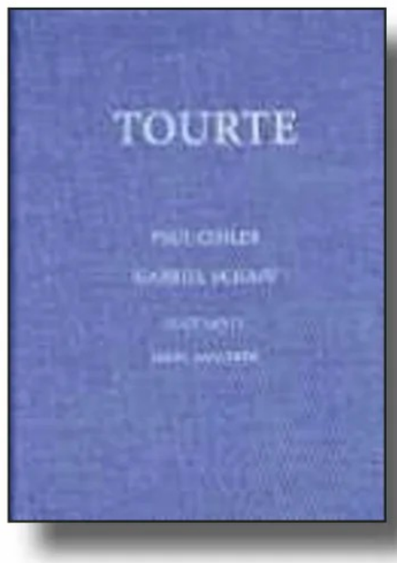

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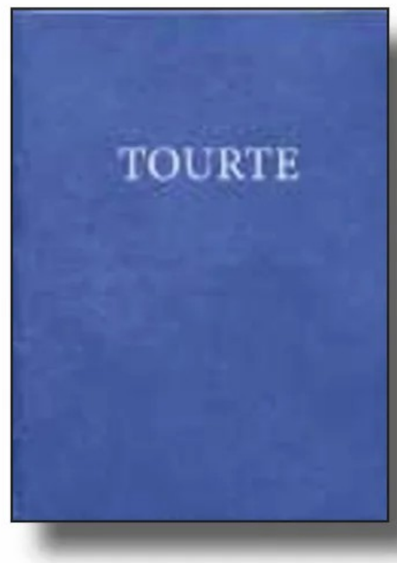

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NAGGING DOUBTS

Cellist and teacher **Naomi Yandell** explores the fine line between nagging and getting a point across by reminder and reinforcement, and suggests that a less verbal approach can often yield good results

The other day as I was walking by the river my train of thought was interrupted by a dog walker who was dragging his unwilling animal along by the lead. If he didn't tell his dog five times to 'come along' it must have been fifty, and despite this the dog took absolutely no notice.

Witnessing this ineffective dog management got me thinking about something one of my children said to me back in the mists of time. I had asked her for the umpteenth time to put her shoes away when she turned around and said that she had heard on the radio that children can tune out parents' voices if they go on and on. I was a mixture of furious and amused, but from her point of view it was effective, because it stopped me in my tracks.

As teachers of young students, we teach new skills, but also remind them about certain aspects of their playing that they have supposedly learnt, whether it be to hold out their left arms (yes, I am a cello teacher) or to soften their thumbs on the bow. But here's the thorny issue; at what point does reminding slip into nagging? And how many repetitions does it take for attentive listening to switch off?

Here's the thorny issue; at what point does reminding slip into nagging?

I have been mulling this over since the dog-walker episode and have subjected myself to self-assessment. It may not come as a surprise that I have deduced that I could do better – but then couldn't we all?

To improve matters, I have tried to incentivise; if the left-hand arm position isn't ideal, I have taken the student into my confidence, saying how much I'd like to be able to start to teach them vibrato, for example, but that the position of their arm means that I have to wait until it has improved. I have tried, 'Once you can play the top part of this double-stopping in time and with a good sound, we can add the other string, like this,' then demonstrated in the hope that it inspires some practice. I have mentioned various orchestras they might join when they are a bit more advanced, or have got to grips with some technical point.

Recently I'm happy to say that this approach resulted in one of my students with hyper-mobile fingers coming in and saying categorically, 'I've fixed my little finger.' Initially, I was sceptical, but his left-hand little finger, instead of poking out awkwardly at a wayward angle was curved and neatly positioned over the fingerboard ready to play. I can't tell you just how positive my reaction was to this development.

Exaggerated visual reminders work well; when, for example, students need to remember to use an up bow for an anacrusis, showing works better than telling. For bow distribution, stickers dividing the bow into sections are useful especially with beginner students.

Specific games and exercises to tackle a single-issue problem are useful too. They enable the student to focus on one small element of their playing in the hope that it will become their default option. With the common left-hand elbow issue, I have also given shifting exercises from first position to thumb position with no specified pitch destination; impossible to do without lifting the elbow up and over the ribs of the instrument.

Nevertheless I find that duet playing is a teacher's shortcut to feeding a student musical super-food; it's fun, you demonstrate as you play, and you can choose the duet that will best address the issue you'd like to focus on. This way, so much can be communicated without words being uttered. The whole experience is light years away from asking a student to do something for the nth time, when they know what you are about to say and how you are going to say it. I'd switch off too – wouldn't you?

The human touch

Musical and emotional maturity made for an artistic, rather than competitive, experience at the Concours de Genève String Quartet edition, as **Rita Fernandes** found

Number plate prefixes: one of the many quirks I love about Geneva. Look closely, and you'll see many begin with 'CD' ('Corps Diplomatique'). They are used by some of the 32,000 international civil servants that help make up Geneva's population of 200,000. It is true that a part of the lakeside city's identity revolves around international organisations, but the local culture is rich also. The intersection between both worlds fascinates me every time I return, not least of all because it somewhat mirrors my own life: I have a fiercely proud Genevan family but have lived in three countries.

When I attended the Concours de Genève in October, it struck me that the competition is not so different from its host city: it has a Swiss secretary general and support from Geneva's local government while being a founding member of the World Federation of International Music Competitions and one of the most internationally renowned contests. Founded in 1939, it is one of the oldest competitions still running. String quartet editions ran every few years from 1941 to 1974 and then, after a break, they were – in his own words – 'brought back' in 2001 by Didier Schnorhk, secretary general since 1999.

I arrived on 27 October to see the last day of the string quartet semi-finals at the Geneva Conservatoire. The intensity of the four-day round, which for each ensemble included two full recitals and an artistic project, was a point of contention. Chair of the jury Corina Belcea (of the Belcea Quartet) told me she felt it may have been 'a bit too much. They need to have six full quartets under their hands. We never need to do that normally when we're touring.' Schnorhk, who came up with the format, explained that it gives a chance for quartets, regardless of whether they get through to the finals, to be properly heard by the jury, audience and industry professionals. As for the competitors, some saw it as a necessary evil, others took it on as a challenge and others relished the opportunity.

The two standouts were the Elmire Quartet from France and the Novo Quartet from Denmark. I couldn't help but define the Elmire as 'French' as soon as the musicians walked out. This impression was strengthened by the name Elmire, a character from Molière's play *Tartuffe*, which, in their words, 'represents French culture and literature'. While their flair veered dangerously towards the pretentious side at times, it allowed them to offer something unique. And their collective interpretation seemed so ingrained that they had space to shine as individuals. Their absolute commitment in Webern's *Langsamer Satz* – a highlight of the competition – was so entrancing that I forgot to take notes, something I realised only when the clapping began.

Next we were off to Denmark, and two words kept coming back throughout the Novo's recital: flexibility and purity. The ensemble began with Nielsen's String Quartet no.1 in G minor, easily on par with the Elmire's Webern. It was as if the musicians had been born knowing the piece. They had an understated confidence, a raw, youthful energy and the flexibility to play around with interpretation. Even visually (they were standing) they seemed to flow as one. The Hana Quartet from Germany, which had performed before I arrived, was the third quartet to go through to the finals with the Elmire and the Novo.

What struck me after only one day of performances was just how different each quartet was. More than in solo contests,

BENNY MARTY/GETTY

Above First prize winners the Novo Quartet
Left The Elmire Quartet came joint second

what mattered was their interpersonal skills, which are inevitably unique to each of their members. They had to be emotionally intelligent more than anything else. This is what made the performances so interesting. In being older than participants in most other competitions, these players were also more musically mature, which from my perspective made for a more artistically focused judging experience. 'The quartet competitions are always so convivial, seeing as the members know each other well,' Schnorhk told me.

The differences were even apparent in the way the quartets rehearsed. The Hana was methodical, with each member taking turns to listen from the hall and return with advice. The Elmire played the piece through and ended with an intense debriefing, with few smiles in sight. The joyful stride of the Novo could not have been more different. Its rehearsal, although still disciplined, was filled with the musicians' laughter and an eager exchange of feedback.

At the 29 October finals in Geneva's Victoria Hall, I was disappointed by the lack of risk in the programming: the Hana and Novo played Mendelssohn and the Elmire played Beethoven. Schnorhk had shared the sentiment when we chatted earlier that morning. This may have been a natural consequence of such a busy semi-final, as the competitors mentioned how important it was for them to be comfortable with their piece.

The Hana Quartet, although still deserving of its place in the finals, was clearly a step below the Novo and Elmire. In Beethoven's 'Rasumovsky' String Quartet no.8, the Elmire often made odd interpretative decisions, namely one up-up-up-up bowing that prompted the jury to turn to each other with questioning looks, as if to say, 'Did they really do that there?' I thoroughly enjoyed the feeling of not knowing where they would go next.

It's easy to say in retrospect because the Novo did end up winning, but as soon as the musicians played the first chord in the Mendelssohn Quartet no.2 in A minor, I knew they would. It was so pure, perfectly balanced, packed with musicality and yet so simple in its beauty. Although I thought the Nielsen was the their best performance overall, it was the climaxes in the second movement of the Mendelssohn that gave me goosebumps.

Alongside the CHF20,000 first prize, the Novo Quartet swept up almost all the special prizes, including the Young Audience Prize, Students' Prize, Audience Prize and Concerts de Jussy Prize. Surprisingly, the Elmire and Hana were awarded joint second. The Elmire did however also win the Fondation Etrillard Prize, for best artistic project (presenting an arrangement of Beethoven's Quartet no.8 featuring an actor).

Following the results, I reflected on what had set the Novo and Elmire apart. It was how well they balanced the group and individual. For the Novo it was a natural by-product of the players' close friendship. 'We know how to deal with each other's problems,' cellist Signe Ebstrup Bitsch told me. 'I know Kaya [Novo's first violinist] needs a McFlurry when she's stressed!' For the Elmire, it came from an intense approach to performing these works. I felt that energy as the musicians told me about their artistic project, all excitedly huddled around a snack-laden table backstage.

Not unlike the ambassadors roaming the streets of Geneva, these players are representatives of something larger than themselves. But the human skills still needed to respect each players' individualities is what made the competition such a captivating one.

IT'S EASY TO SAY IN RETROSPECT, BUT AS SOON AS THE NOVO MUSICIANS PLAYED THE FIRST CHORD, I KNEW THEY WOULD WIN

PHOTOS ANNE-LAURE LECHAT

TIMOTHY RIDOUT

‘PEOPLE WANT TO HEAR SOMETHING DIFFERENT’

Timothy Ridout is the latest in a line of brilliant British violists that stretches back to Lionel Tertis. He speaks to **Toby Deller** about the legacy of this influential musician, his own fight to expand the viola repertoire, and his latest recording – a Tertis celebration

JIYANG CHEN

Perhaps it was ghosts that led Timothy Ridout and me to the site of the old Queen's Hall in central London. The intended location for our interview having fallen through at the last moment, we relocated to a hotel rooftop bar nearby, only later realising that it occupied the very block where the concert hall once stood. Destroyed during the Second World War, it had been a focal point of English classical music life in the late Victorian and Edwardian period and beyond. It was there that Henry Wood launched the Proms in 1895. Indeed, it was there, in 1930, that Lionel Tertis premiered his transcription for viola of Elgar's Cello Concerto, with the composer conducting, a piece that Ridout has himself performed and recorded.

His subsequent and latest release for the label Harmonia Mundi, a double album entitled *A Lionel Tertis Celebration*, is also steeped in the music of that time. 'I love music from that period,' says the 28-year-old, who grew up in the decidedly un-Edwardian town of Luton, not far from London. 'I find it beautiful and charming and passionate and romantic. I think it's a period, particularly in the history of the viola, when composers really understood the strengths of the instrument and they played to those strengths. Take the York Bowen Viola Sonata no.1 and Rebecca Clarke's Sonata. There's such a great mix of playing with the sonorities of the instrument: beautiful melodies that exploit the lower registers, which are what make the viola so special, then also the more mysterious colours in the higher register are explored. And then there are the opposite, equally mysterious colours at the bottom and the more powerful ones of the top. I really appreciate the way the instrument is used.'

Those two are the most substantial works on the release, which was made in collaboration with pianists Frank Dupree (*below*) and James Baillieu. The numerous other pieces, reflecting Tertis's varied contribution to the viola's literature, include a couple of Tertis originals (*Sunset* and *Hier au Soir*); Bridge's *Pensiero* and *Allegro appassionato*; Vaughan Williams's *Six Studies in English Folk Song*; and W.H. Reed's *Rhapsody*, a work Ridout discovered courtesy of violist and educator Louise Lansdown. There are also transcriptions by Tertis of Brahms, Schumann and Fauré; and transcriptions by Ridout himself, as well as his completion of Bowen's viola obbligato to Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Piano Sonata. ▹

YAN DYVER

Ridout recording the Elgar concerto with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Martyn Brabbins in 2022

'Of course, Tertis was a figure I was very much aware of from the moment I became a serious viola player as a teenager,' Ridout tells me. 'I started to hear Tertis's recordings and realised how much of the viola repertoire and the identity of the viola player from the 20th century onwards is thanks to Lionel Tertis. I read his autobiography, *My Viola and I*, as a teenager, and John White's 2006 book [*Lionel Tertis: The First Great Virtuoso of the Viola*] as well, which is a bit more of a substantial read.' Having listened to Tertis's interpretations, however, he stresses that he was not tempted to try to copy him. 'It's such a different style from modern playing, but the more I listen, the more I appreciate the quality and the amazing virtuosity he had: there's the Mozart Sinfonia concertante cadenza that he did with Albert Sammons where the viola goes really, crazily high and he's super clean and in tune. His way of playing is in a portamento style that's very different from how we play now, but I really admire it.'

Lionel Tertis c.1903

The project's earliest seed was planted when Ridout first learnt the Bowen sonata as a 14-year-old – it has remained an important piece for him. Later, as a student browsing the library at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) in London, another took root: 'I would look through boxes of viola sheet music and see what I could find,' he recalls. 'On one particular occasion I found two books of Tertis arrangements and transcriptions – I think it might have been called something like the "Lionel Tertis Legacy" or "Lionel Tertis Collection". I took them out of the library and learnt some of the pieces. I thought they were lovely arrangements. There were also a couple of original compositions. And there were some pieces by a man called William Wolstenholme, who I hadn't heard of at that time. He was actually a blind organist, and I think Tertis really admired his music, so on my disc there are a couple of pieces by Wolstenholme.' He describes these miniatures (Allegretto in E flat major op.17 no.2 and *The Question* op.13 ▹

'MUCH OF THE REPERTOIRE AND THE IDENTITY OF THE VIOLA PLAYER FROM THE 20TH CENTURY ONWARDS IS THANKS TO LIONEL TERTIS'

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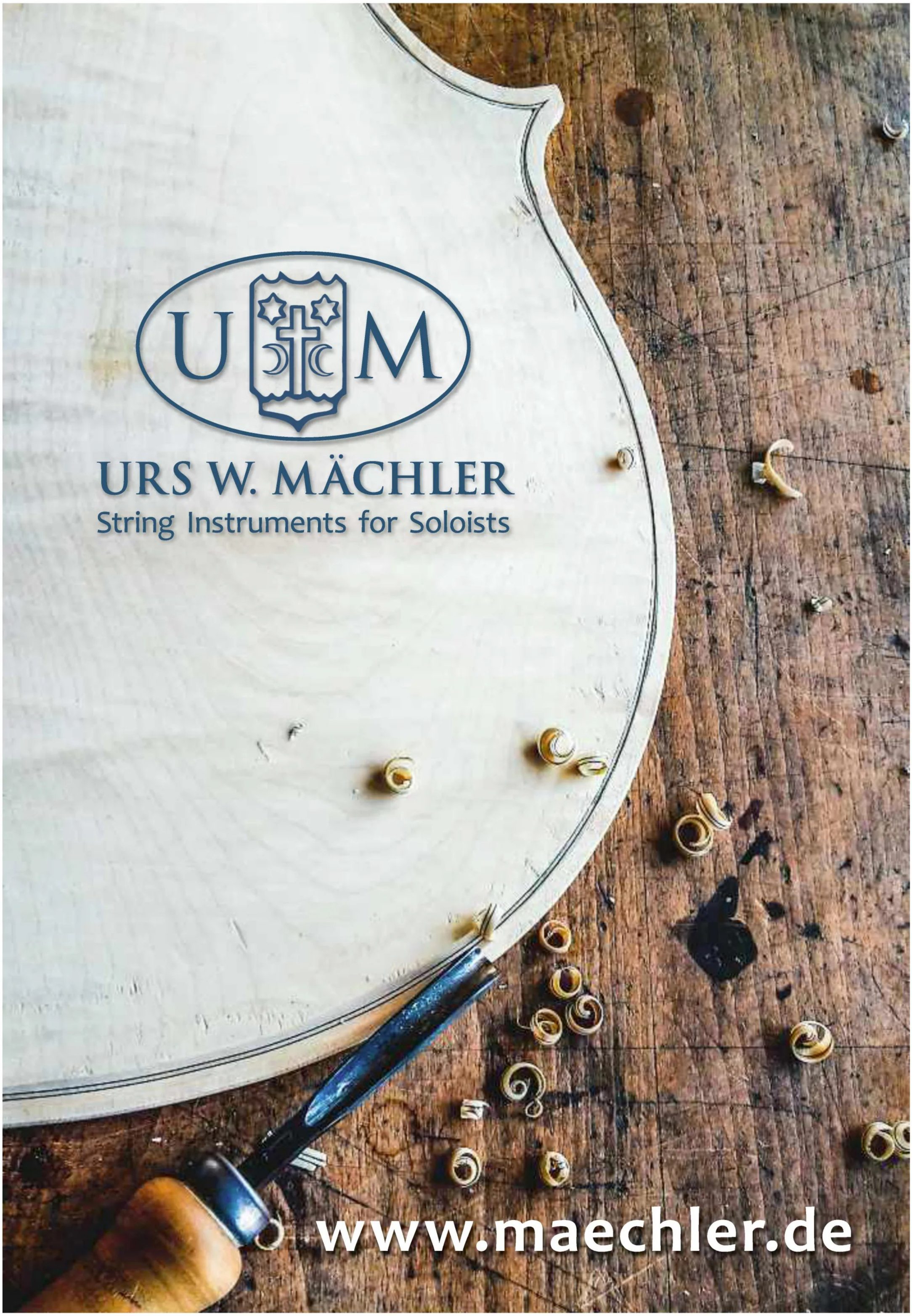
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no.1) as ‘just such a charming time capsule, somehow. I guess it’s in the imagination, as I don’t know what Edwardian Britain was like, but the pieces seem to sum up all the good parts of that time period in this country.’

So, his curiosity for seeking out and exploring original repertoire has not diminished since his student days, whether this is music he tracks down himself or music that comes as a recommendation – as an example he mentions the Kapustin Viola Sonata, which came to him courtesy of Dupree, who had been recording the composer’s piano concertos. Ridout is increasingly following Tertis in being able to commission work, with a concerto from British composer Mark Simpson confirmed and others in discussion. And he has already demonstrated his interest in making transcriptions for himself with his version of Schumann’s *Dichterliebe* that he recorded with Dupree for the first of his Harmonia Mundi albums *A Poet’s Love* (2021). ‘People want to hear something different. There have been so many great recordings made in the last century of the same repertoire that I think it’s interesting to look at different material. I love all the main repertoire and I do continue to play it and enjoy it; but a singer, for example, has such a huge repertoire of song and opera, and I think there’s no reason why we as viola players shouldn’t have the same breadth in our repertoire. If that means borrowing then I don’t see any problem with that.’

JIYANG CHEN

It may not come as such a surprise to learn, then, that Ridout’s earliest musical enthusiasm as a boy was singing. Although he was taking viola lessons, having chosen the instrument at school following a demonstration by various peripatetic music teachers, his love of singing kept him from any serious dedication to the viola until his voice was changing. ‘I can’t tell you the exact moment when I really started practising seriously, but it was around the age of 12 or 13 – definitely before 14. But for the first four years of having viola lessons, I was way more interested in singing and hanging out with my friends, going to Scouts, shooting air rifles, making fires – those sorts of things. I think I did always go to youth orchestra then, but I was doing quite a lot of activities and there wasn’t that much time left for practising; and when there was time, I’d want to watch telly! But it wasn’t a priority for me at that at age; it wasn’t something I felt that I had to do. There would often be days in a row when maybe I wouldn’t practise and then my parents would say: “OK, you’ve got a lesson tomorrow; you need to practise now.” But they would never push me to practise above the bare minimum requirement on any day. I think that comes from the fact that they both come from musical families and so they never thought that music should be something inflicted on me!’

Once he was practising seriously – and by now needing no encouragement – his progress was rapid. He joined the junior department at the RAM (his teacher was Jonathan Barritt) ▹

before entering the senior department to study with Martin Outram. This was followed by three years (2016–19) studying at the Kronberg Academy in Germany, where his teacher was Nobuko Imai, whom he would visit at her home for intensive lessons every few weeks while at other times joining his fellow students in participating in and observing masterclasses with other well-known figures.

'I've had three really big viola playing influences: Jonathan, Martin and Nobuko,' he tells me. 'With Martin, the lessons were always so well structured and the week-by-week progress that we were working on was really clear. It was a fantastic grounding for me. In the third and fourth years we worked a lot more on repertoire. Martin also has this amazing knowledge of repertoire, so he always encouraged me to do lots of different things both in a practical sense and in a more poetic sense, giving me ideas about the ways to work on and interpret the music. But the technical structure he gave me at the beginning of my studies was really fantastic.'

It was towards the end of his RAM studies in 2016 that he won the Lionel Tertis International Viola Competition, having previously won the inaugural Cecil Aronowitz International Viola Competition in 2014. That gave him the impetus to seek out the instrument he plays today, a Peregrino Di Zanetto from 1565–75 on loan to him from a patron who prefers to remain anonymous. As a student he had been playing on a 1677 Giovanni Grancino belonging to the RAM and which, as he was graduating, he would very shortly have to return.

He recalls: 'Having the Tertis competition win behind me, I decided to write to Beare's. They were so kind to me. They presented me with a table of six or seven beautiful violas, really amazing instruments, some by much more famous makers than Zanetto. They were all good, but I didn't feel any one was a lot better than the Grancino. Then they said they had one in the safe downstairs, but that it was very big and probably didn't really suit what I was looking for. The Zanetto is quite large at 17.2in or 43.7cm – around that. They brought this thing up: it looked massive, like a medieval wardrobe, in a way! Such a different style, and the f-holes were a different shape from those on modern [as in post-Amati] instruments. It felt like the more I experimented with the bow, the more the instrument gave back, the more depth I could find, the more colours I could find.' (His main bow, which he uses 'for 99 per cent' of his concerts is an Alfred Lamy from the first decade of the 20th century, which he bought in 2015, but he also owns a couple of modern bows.)

Ridout admits that the Zanetto was initially uncomfortable to play, but he soon adjusted to its larger size. 'There's the obvious thing about intonation,' he replies when I ask about the initial challenges, 'but the stop length wasn't so different because of the position of the f-holes. It was more about how to use the bow because it's an instrument where, if you don't use the right hand very well and don't take care of how you catch the string, it could easily not speak so well.'

Only a few days after picking it up for the first time, he used the instrument to audition successfully for a place on the UK-based Young Classical Artists Trust scheme, dedicated to supporting concert artists in the early stages of their careers.

The Peregrino Di Zanetto viola (from 1565–75), which Ridout currently plays

FLORIAN LEONHARD FINE VIOLINS

'IT'S IMPORTANT TO SPEAK UP FOR THE VIOLA AND ITS REPERTOIRE. WITH TRENDS OF PROGRAMMING, THAT DOESN'T SEEM TO HAPPEN NATURALLY WITHOUT A FIGHT'

Ridout during the recording for his 2021 album, *A Poet's Love*

Other accolades include two years as a BBC New Generation Artist (2019–21) and receipt of the 2023 Young Artist award from the Royal Philharmonic Society. In the US, meanwhile, he was selected by the Bowers Program of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in New York for a three-year residency that runs until 2024 and for which he joins various other musicians in recitals.

Ensemble playing accounts for a substantial amount of his live appearances elsewhere. He has been a member of the Teyber Trio – the all-Timothy group completed by violinist Tim Crawford and cellist Tim Posner – since he was in his mid-teens. He has joined other artists in making chamber recordings (namely Mendelssohn string quintets with the Doric Quartet and Mozart piano quartets with Francesca Dego, Laura van der Heijden and pianist Federico Colli) and also now regularly performs alongside elite soloists such as Isabelle Faust and Janine Jansen, as well as Lawrence Power, the violist in whose footsteps he is most obviously treading. 'I've played for him a few times in masterclasses and I also have played quite a bit with him in the Nash Ensemble in sextets and octets and a little bit at the Lockenhaus Festival as well. I think he's an incredible violist.' The pair can be heard playing together in an excerpt from Bridge's *Lament* (bitly.ws/35mSx), a clip that gives a sense of a baton being shared, if not yet passed on. 'There are many still-living violists I've had lessons from,' says Ridout, 'Nobuko being one of the greats, Tabea Zimmermann, Antoine Tamestit – and many others I should probably name. Of course, Lawrence is in London more often, and as a teenager I could often go and watch him and the Nash Ensemble performing. I was always in awe of his incredible ability and imagination.'

Increasingly, Ridout's own personality is coming to the fore with the prospect of new works alongside an admirable commitment to representing the viola repertoire in all its dimensions, as his recordings so far attest. These range from his debut survey (with pianist Ke Ma) of Vieuxtemps's complete works for viola (for Champs Hill Records) to Martinů, Vaughan Williams, Hindemith and Britten with the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra (Claves). His *Dichterliebe* has a contrasting pairing in Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* (in the Borisovsky transcription); and that typically Edwardian Elgar Concerto, meanwhile, is coupled with Bloch's Suite with its highly characteristic sound world. Similarly, a Wigmore Hall recital a week after we met took in Sally Beamish, Caroline Shaw and György Kurtág as well as Bach and Telemann.

And now that he has also taken on the role of visiting professor at the RAM there is even more opportunity to take on an advocacy role in the manner of the man to whom his new recording pays tribute. 'I think it's important, particularly with an instrument like the viola, to speak up for it and its repertoire. With trends of programming, that doesn't seem to happen naturally without more of a fight. Tertis really fought for the viola. I think he really battled to get his commissions and to get his things done.' ●

YAN DYVER

ASSOCIATION DES AMIS DU PETIT PALAIS, GENEVA; PHOTO STUDIO MONIQUE BERNAZ, GENEVA

A LOVE REVIVED

Violinist Philippe Graffin has recorded a work for violin and orchestra by Eugène Ysaÿe that had lain undiscovered for more than a century. He speaks to **Jessica Duchen** about the love affair that inspired the piece, and what can be learnt from its discovery

Above Théo van Rysselberghe's 1894 portrait of violinist Irma Sèthe

The story is astonishing: an unknown work for violin and orchestra by Eugène Ysaÿe, found, orchestrated and recorded for the first time more than a century after its composition. Its name: *Poème concertant*. Its inspiration: a passionate relationship between the composer and one of his ex-pupils, Irma Sèthe, herself an exceptionally gifted violinist. And alongside its recording is the first full-length recording of the composer's earlier Violin Concerto in E minor.

It looks like a project that was simply waiting for Philippe Graffin to come along. The French violinist and professor has such a reputation as musical sleuth that he might soon need a TV drama series to himself. Where Ysaÿe is concerned, Graffin discovered a seventh solo violin sonata to add to the famous six; it was the topic of a documentary he made in 2019–20, *Ysaÿe's Secret Sonata*, and also features on his recital recording *Fiddler's Blues*. Before that, he sought out and recorded the original

pre-Kreisler version of Elgar's Violin Concerto, and twenty years ago he dug out, then recorded in South Africa, the Coleridge-Taylor Violin Concerto, long before it became fashionable. For his latest Ysaÿe adventure, he has worked with the musicologist Xavier Falques on resuscitating this revelatory music.

I'm meeting Graffin in a place Ysaÿe himself would have known and where he might have met his friends when arriving from Brussels: the brasserie Terminus Nord, opposite the Gare du Nord in Paris. Graffin has settled in the French capital after a twenty-year spell in London and holds teaching posts at both the Paris Conservatoire and the Royal Conservatory of Brussels. Ysaÿe, Belgium's most celebrated violinist, was effectively his musical grandfather, as Graffin studied at the University of Indiana's Jacobs School of Music in Bloomington, with Josef Gingold, an Ysaÿe student and inheritor of his radically expressive approach to violinistic sound and colour.

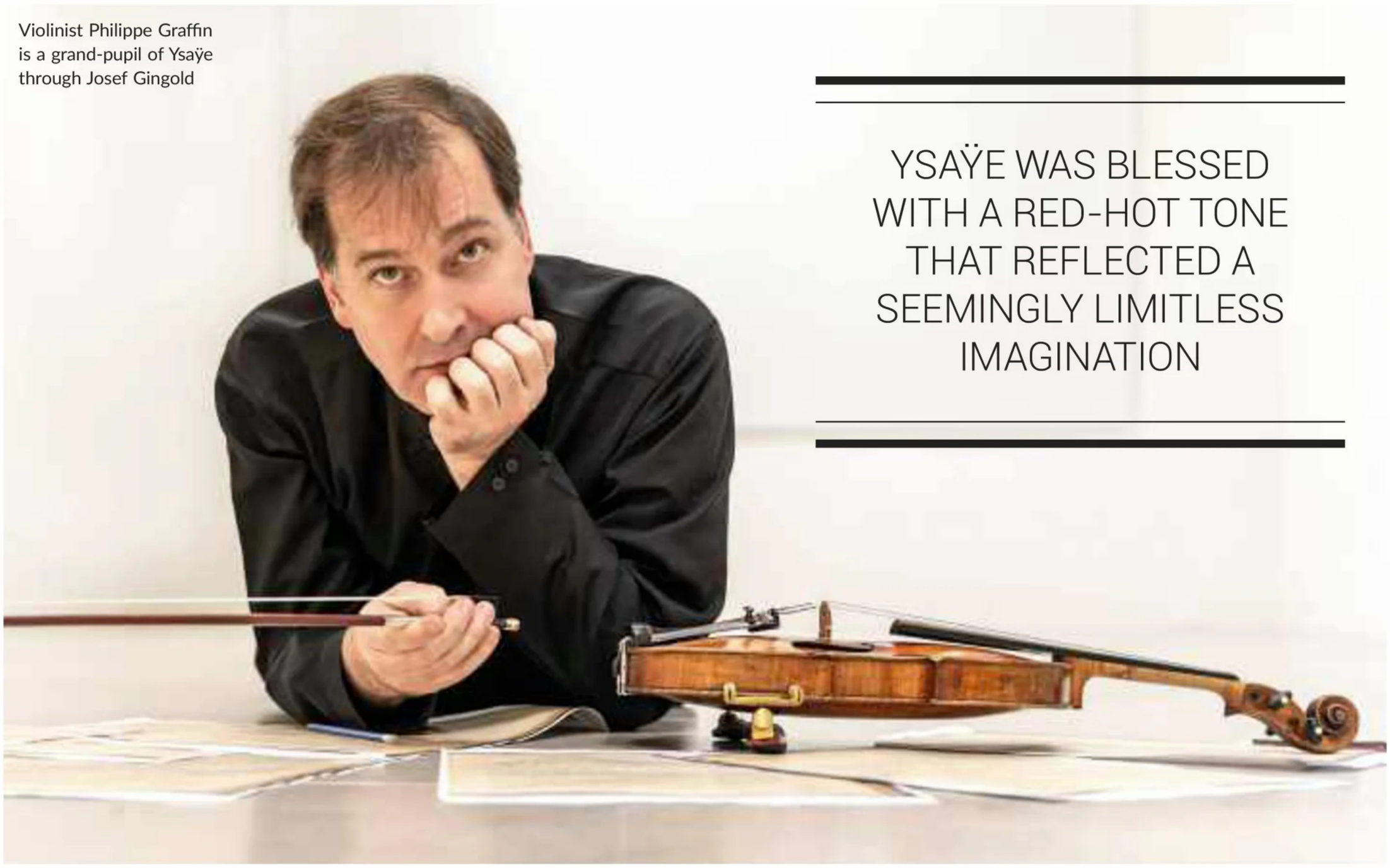
Eugène Ysaÿe in 1883

Ysaÿe himself was a larger-than-life personality in every sense. The conductor Henry Wood noted of him: 'The quality of tone was ravishingly beautiful… He seemed to get more colour out of a violin than any of his contemporaries.' He was blessed with a red-hot tone that reflected a seemingly limitless imagination, and had a generosity of spirit that led him to start a summer school on the Belgian coast at Knokke where his students could play day and night. He had been a student of Wieniawski and Vieuxtemps, and early on impressed Clara Schumann and Joachim, as well as Rubinstein, who effectively 'discovered' him.

Even without works of his own, he would have transformed the repertoire for solo violin single-handedly just by inspiring others. He is the dedicatee of such masterpieces as the Franck Violin Sonata (a wedding present from the composer), Chausson's *Poème* and *Concert* and the Lekeu Sonata. He and his string quartet were profoundly influential: Debussy wrote his sole quartet for them, and Fauré his Piano Quintet no.1. The Ysaÿe Quartet premiered both, the second in 1906 with Fauré himself at the piano.

As a composer, however, Ysaÿe has been more elusive. 'All my life I'd lived with the idea that Ysaÿe tried to write violin concertos in his youth, then gave up around the time he commissioned the Chausson *Poème*,' says Graffin. 'So there was the *Poème élégiaque* in 1892, the commissioning of the Chausson in 1893 and then he only wrote *poèmes* of his own, publishing seven of them. It's turned out that that is not quite right.'

The only extant work for violin and orchestra by Ysaÿe with three movements is the Violin Concerto in E minor (1884–5), which was left incomplete. Falques, who recreated the finale (based on the second one that Ysaÿe composed for the concerto) writes: 'Correspondence and sketches provide glimpses of a ▸


Violinist Philippe Graffin is a grand-pupil of Ysaÿe through Josef Gingold

YSAŸE WAS BLESSED WITH A RED-HOT TONE THAT REFLECTED A SEEMINGLY LIMITLESS IMAGINATION

YSAŸE PHOTO ROYAL LIBRARY OF BELGIUM. GRAFFIN PHOTO MARIE VAN DER BERG

lengthy process of reflection and revision aimed at bringing this work to fruition.' But perhaps one reason that the E minor Concerto was unfinished was that Ysaÿe wished to explore a whole new direction instead. 'I believe that the virtuoso violin concerto, like those by his teachers Vieuxtemps or Wieniawski, did not appeal to him any more,' Graffin says. 'He imagined and invented a more poetic, free, narrative and intimate role for the soloist.'

The image of Irma Sèthe is best known from the artist Théo van Rysselberghe's 1894 elegant pointillist portrait of her playing the violin (with a seated figure in the background suggesting the presence of her sister). It shows a young woman of great poise and character: a quizzical, direct, intelligent gaze and a sense of being at ease, even at one, with her violin and bow. A photograph of her by Adolphe Hamesse, displaying an altogether more modern style of dress, confirms the authenticity of that gaze. In 1906 the *Musical Times* reviewed a well-attended concert that she gave at London's Bechstein Hall (today Wigmore Hall): 'This lady is a violinist of the first rank, reflecting in notable manner the style of her teacher, M. Ysaÿe… Mme Sèthe played with convincing expression and power.'

A former child prodigy, Sèthe was about 18 years old when Ysaÿe, who had once been her teacher, fell head over heels in love with her (it was common in those days for women to marry and start families at 18 or younger). At the time (from which the Van Rysselberghe painting dates), he was a married man of 35 and the relationship was evidently doomed from the start. 'He could not resist his passion,' Graffin says, 'and he imposed this other relationship on his wife for a while. Then he tried to write a concerto for Sèthe, a concerto in G minor. A letter from him, written in 1894, exists in which he explains what the themes are, with a central core theme of despair. This is something very rare to have for an unknown piece of music. We also discover that the work was to be 25 minutes long, and at the end of the letter, which itself is very beautiful, he speaks of "this concert piece – which is rather a 'poëme'."'

Eventually Ysaÿe, his situation untenable, broke off with Sèthe, though they remained on correspondence terms. Several years later she married the Russian philosopher, journalist, writer and diplomat Samuel Saenger and moved with him to Berlin, where they raised two daughters. Unlike many female musicians of the time, however, she never relinquished her career.

'I BELIEVE THAT THE VIRTUOSO VIOLIN CONCERTO DID NOT APPEAL TO YSAŸE ANY MORE. HE INVENTED A MORE POETIC, FREE, NARRATIVE AND INTIMATE ROLE FOR THE SOLOIST' – *PHILIPPE GRAFFIN*

Photograph of the young Irma Sèthe by Adolphe Hamesse

She continued performing – in everything from solo recitals to the Berlin Philharmonic – and teaching until late in her life. The couple were able to leave Germany just in time before the outbreak of the Second World War, moving first to Paris and then the US. Sèthe died in New York in 1958.

Ysaÿe began writing the G minor work that was to become the *Poème concertant* in 1893 – at the Sèthe family home. Then he reworked it, again and again. Falques writes that rather than losing power or conviction after the relationship with Sèthe ended, 'The work, on the contrary, takes on a new dimension that imparts an extra soul to the notes.' Hearing Sèthe play this 'concert work', Ysaÿe wrote to her that it 'tells the passionate drama that is unfolding here at this hour – this music in which there is a sense of insatiability, where one seems to be chasing after something that never arrives… I know that no other work I write will express this bitter chapter of our existence better than this one!'

Josef Gingold

'He kept working on it for 18 years,' says Graffin. 'Every time he had to write out the entire score again, so there are various different manuscripts, each becoming more elaborate. But it's a "forbidden" piece. The whole family knew the story behind it, and in fact Mr Gingold told me about Irma Sèthe. So that was the big passion of Ysaÿe's early life.'

Even if the work remained off limits and unpublished, Graffin says, 'Ysaÿe never gave up on this piece, and that's why I think he never gave up on the idea of writing a concerto, because there are sketches for a third ▹

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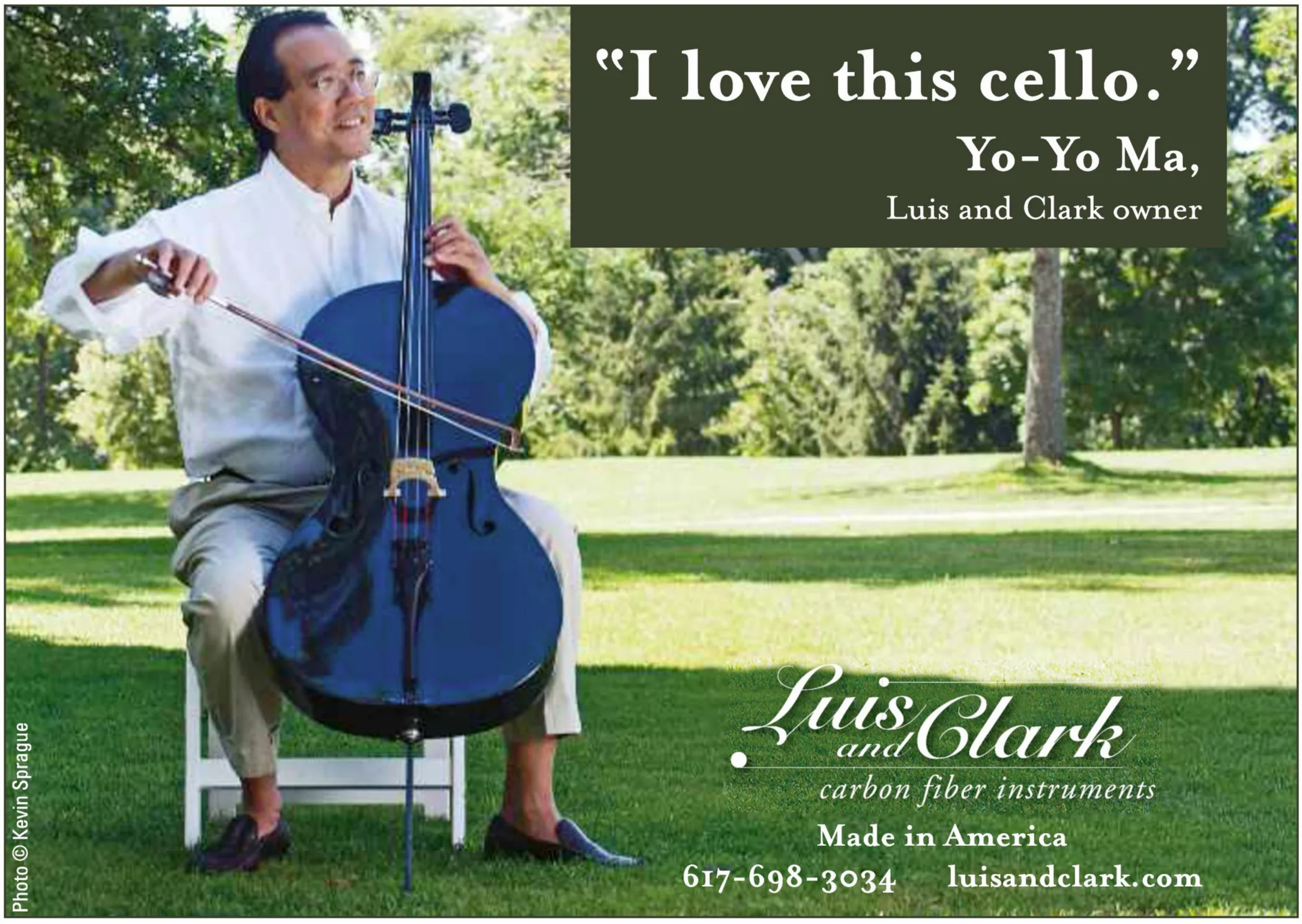

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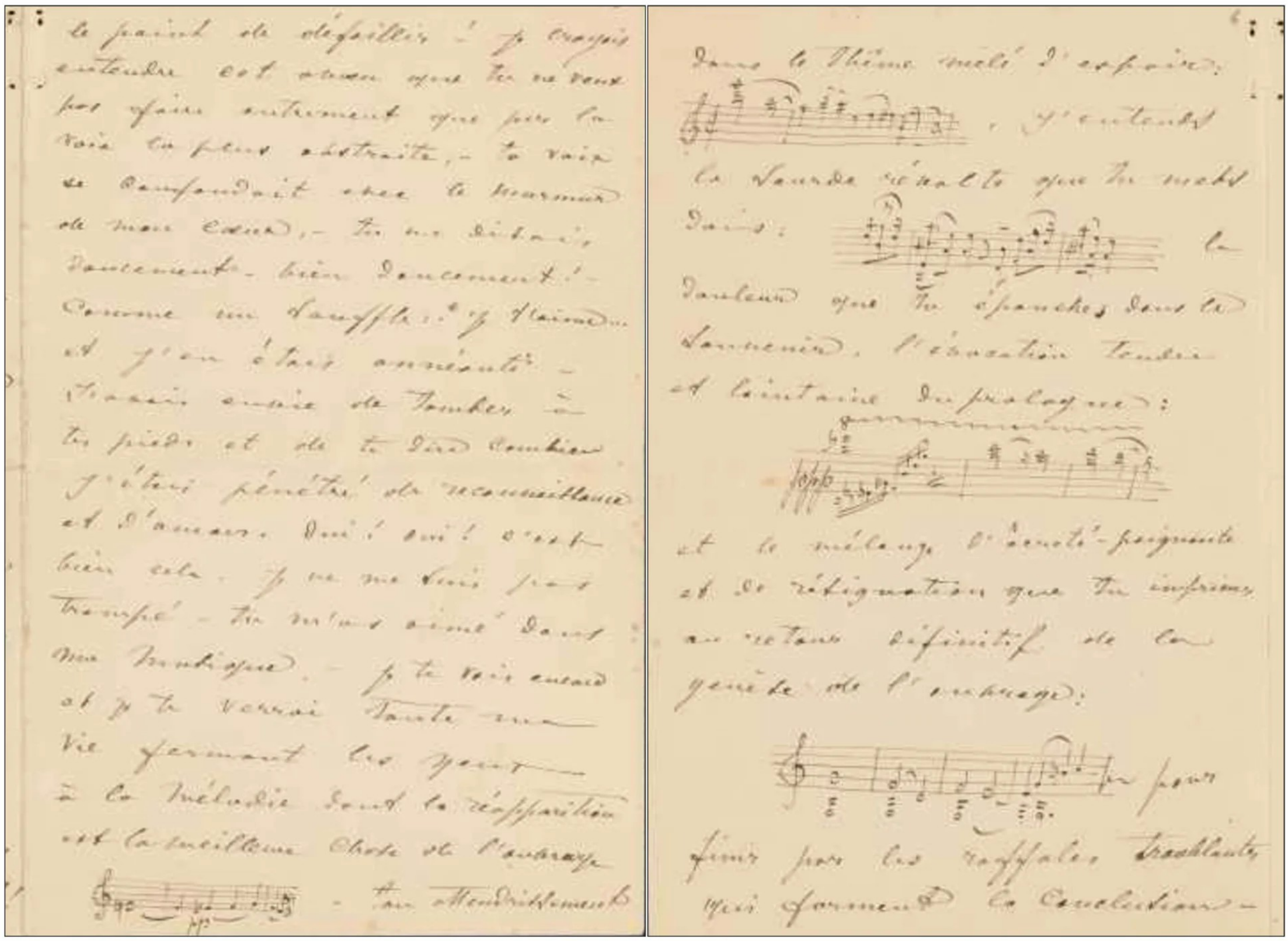

Pages 5 and 6 of an undated letter from Ysaÿe to Irma Sèthe, which includes musical motifs for what was to become the *Poème concertant*

movement for it.' (There is no evidence of a second movement, however.) The music outlived the passionate emotions that inspired it and gradually acquired a life of its own: 'He changed the dedication, inscribing it to his best friend. But while it was a concerto for reference, he refers to it in letters as "Poème concertant".' Graffin says.

Graffin's long-standing fascination with Ysaÿe started with the legendary Belgian's string quartet and friendship with Debussy. 'I approach Ysaÿe's solo sonatas as if they are the violin equivalent of Debussy's short piano pieces,' he says. 'I think they are often played by violinists as virtuoso works when in fact they are very impressionistic.' Their virtuosity is simply not the point, he suggests. 'Ysaÿe's motto was: "Ne jamais rien faire qui n'ai pour buts et moyens l'émotion, la poésie, le coeur" ['Never do anything that does not have emotion, poetry, the heart as its goals']. The phrase appears on a memorial urn in the Ysaÿe Museum in Liège. The sonatas seem to speak of Bach, Chopin and a vast repertoire – for violinists they are a voyage into a larger world. Thanks to Mr Gingold, I could see through this music the ways that the violin could be expressive.'

Every student of Gingold, Graffin suggests, would have come away with an individual impression of Ysaÿe's heritage. 'Mr Gingold had very specific things to say about what Ysaÿe did in this passage or that, in every piece that was "his" – like the Franck Sonata or the Chausson *Poème*. We all knew those stories. But the most important thing was that you'd come into the room and Mr Gingold, who would have his violin in his hands, would play something, you would play something, and then he would show you how much more expressive it could be. He had an incredible way of doing things within the notes and in between the notes; and his sense of rubato was very influenced by Ysaÿe, taking time and making up for it. In that sense, we had more than a glimpse of Ysaÿe. For us, Ysaÿe is a myth, but for Mr Gingold he was a real person. He spent two and a half years with him, and he used to say, "I can see him as I can see you." For me, the impression that remains is the means of expression, especially the colours he could create with the left hand and the bow.' ▹

> 'FOR MR GINGOLD, YSAŸE WAS A REAL PERSON. HE USED TO SAY, "I CAN SEE HIM AS I CAN SEE YOU"'– *PHILIPPE GRAFFIN*

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Graffin recording the *Poème concertant* with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic and Jean-Jacques Kantorow

'THERE IS NO QUESTION OF RECOMPOSITION. WE MADE SURE NOT TO WRITE A SINGLE NOTE THAT WAS NOT YSAŸE'S OWN' – *PHILIPPE GRAFFIN*

SESSION PHOTO BRUNO MAES. GROUP PHOTO COURTESY OF ERIKA VEGA

Philippe Graffin, conductor Jean-Jacques Kantorow and composer Erika Vega at the recording sessions

One example is his approach to vibrato, which Graffin identifies as profoundly influential: 'Ysaÿe was arguably one of the first violinists to use vibrato. The teacher of Ginette Neveu, the violinist Jules Boucherit, wrote in his memoirs that in the 1890s, when Ysaÿe was beginning his career, Pablo Sarasate was reaching the end of his, and that the difference between them was that one was using vibrato and the other wasn't.'

Graffin points to recordings that Ysaÿe made as early as 1912, and the violinist's determination to push the boundaries: 'A special machine was made for him on which he could record for as long as five minutes,' he says. 'That's why his recordings were slightly longer than anybody else's at the time.' They do sound extraordinarily clear and vivid, given that they are around 111 years old: 'Now I listen to them as if he's in the next room. He was almost the musical narrator of his times. I got into the Debussy Quartet, the Fauré First Quintet and the Chausson *Poème* because of him, because I think they were written as they were because of his violinistic abilities and musical skill: he could create colours, he could vibrate and he gave the composers a different "instrument" to work with. After that, through the sonatas I found him as a composer in his own right: not just a violinist who also writes, but a real artist.'

Graffin continues: 'What fascinates me about the *Poème concertant* is that it's a forbidden piece that is actually very rich. Xavier Falques worked for seven years on it, putting all the information from the various manuscripts into a final one for violin and piano. But there are so many passages for orchestra alone that finally I decided to have it orchestrated fully, as it would have been in Ysaÿe's time. I commissioned my friend, the Mexican composer Erika Vega, to do it. Xavier, meanwhile, studied the orchestration of Ysaÿe further, orchestrated the finale of the concerto in E minor, and advised Erika. I asked Xavier also to make a chamber version with string quartet and piano, like the instrumentation of the Chausson *Concert*.'

Graffin is partnered in the new recording (on the Avie label) by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Jean-Jacques Kantorow. The sum total of vast amounts of work, it represents a huge achievement. 'We primarily reconstructed the orchestration based on the annotations left by Ysaÿe in his manuscripts,' Falques writes. 'There is no question of recomposition; instead, we aimed to rediscover Ysaÿe's orchestral approach and that of his mentors. Consequently, we made sure not to write a single note that was not Ysaÿe's own.'

And for the future? Will we be hearing more of the *Poème concertant*? Graffin is giving the world premiere performance of the new chamber version, alongside the Chausson *Concert*, during the 2024 Belgian Music Days at the Royal Conservatory, Brussels. Appropriately enough, it is on Valentine's Day. 'Whether it will ultimately find a place in the repertoire alongside Ysaÿe's more famous pieces, I don't know,' Graffin says. 'But it is a great work and it can hold its own.' ●

Special thanks to Xavier Falques and to Marie Cornaz, curator of the music division at the Royal Library of Belgium. Philippe Graffin's new album Rêves *is released on 9 February*

THE ART OF THE DEAL

Signed 100 years ago, an agreement between luthier Stefano Scarampella and his apprentice Gaetano Gadda has recently been discovered. **Philip Kass** explains how it shines a light on the business relationship between two of Mantua's leading 20th-century makers

On 8 August 1924, two violin makers met to work out a sales contract. One was old and at the end of his career; the other was just beginning to make his mark. The consequences of their agreement would extend the influence of the older maker right up to the present day, and fix in our collective minds the look and style of Mantuan violin making.

Stefano Scarampella, the elder one, had been the pre-eminent luthier in Mantua since the 1880s, filling a gap left by the death in 1870 of Gaetano Dionelli. A native of Brescia, Scarampella was born on 17 March 1843 and had just marked his 81st birthday. His training came from his father and especially his brother Giuseppe, who had trained in Genoa, Nice and Paris, and had finished his career in Florence as curator of the collection at the Conservatorio. Stefano, though, was a dilettante, having only arrived

Above A selection of tools from the Gadda workshop, now on display at the Chimei Museum in Taiwan

Right Front of a 1924 violin by Scarampella, also part of the Chimei collection

COURTESY CHIMEI FOUNDATION

in Mantua in 1886 to work on the railway line linking the towns of the Po valley. He listed his profession with the local registry as a carpenter and mechanic. A violin he submitted to a local exposition held there in 1890 earned much acclaim as well as a silver medal, and from that time on he devoted himself to violin making.

By all indications, Stefano was an easy-going soul (far too much so for his brother's taste), and seems to have worked casually, taking time out of his schedule for local repairs as well as for mentoring some of the local individuals who had an interest in the craft. He had a reputation for making instruments that were tonally excellent but also something of a bargain; his brother chided him for selling his instruments for barely more than the cost of the wood. Most of his guidance went to individuals such as Antonio Pivetta, Oreste Martini, Remo Solferini, Lorenzo Stelluto, Riccardo Cerutti, the Guastalla brothers, Oreste Carpi and Amedeo Simonazzi; individuals who took time away from their day jobs to learn the craft. In the case of the latter few, they made periodic and brief trips from towns outside Mantua in order to gain advice on their ongoing efforts: this resulted in all of them claiming to have been his students, even though the degree of training varied considerably between them. There was only one of them who we can truly identify as a pupil, and that individual was the other signatory to the agreement.

Gaetano Gadda, the younger man, was new to the trade. He was born on 13 April 1900 in Sorgà, a village in the territory of Verona about twelve miles north-east of Mantua. He and his family arrived in the city on 17 November 1915; prior to their arrival Gaetano had been recorded as a fisherman. The family moved into accommodation at via Tazzoli 3, the very same building in which Stefano Scarampella had been living since 1898. This is no doubt how they met, as neighbours.

Contracts such as the document they were about to sign are in principle not rare; we would presume such a contract would be drawn up in any similar transfer of ownership. This one is interesting for two reasons: it involves two of the premier violin makers of the 20th century, and it has survived. The agreement was not formally drawn up by a lawyer. It is an informal contract drawn up by the two parties with their mutual assent, and is witnessed by a third, in this case Lorenzo Stelluto, a policeman and official of the courts, who was also an amateur violin maker and a pupil of Scarampella. We have this act because it was acquired by the Chimei Foundation when it acquired the workshop materials of Mario Gadda, which included the ▸

SCARAMPELLA HAD A REPUTATION FOR MAKING INSTRUMENTS THAT WERE TONALLY EXCELLENT BUT ALSO SOMETHING OF A BARGAIN

COURTESY CHIMEI FOUNDATION

Mantova 8 agosto 1924-

C O N V E N Z I O N E

Fra i sottoscritti Sigg.GAETANO GADDA fu Riccardo e STEFANO SCARAMPELLA fu Paolo entrambi di professione liutai residenti in Mantova,si conviene e si stipula quanto segue:

Il Sig.Stefano Scarampella dichiara di cedere ed alienare, come col presente atto cede ed aliena,tutti i propri utensili ed attrezzi di liuteria,ivi compresi i modelli e stampi in carta,cartone,legno e stagno di violini,viole e violoncelli e di parti degli istrumenti medesimi,ed ivi compresi altresì i banchi,morse, serrette,scalpelli,Molle ecc.,che attualmente si trovano in di lui proprietà ed in uso all[illegible] Sig.Gaetano Gadda,e li cede ed aliena al nominato Sig.Gaetano Gadda valutandoli d'accordo con lui al prezzo di L.2000- diconsi lire duemila-

Il Sig.Gadda in cambio di ciò dichiara di abbandonare,come col presente atto abbandona,ogni pretesa e ragione,sia verso il sig.Stefano Scarampella che verso i di lui eredi,per l'opera professionale al medesimo Sig.Scarampella da esso sig.Gadda prestata fino ad ora, e concretata,fino a tutto febbraio del corr.anno,nella esecuzione per di lui conto e utilità di riparazioni e costruzione di vari istrumenti musicali,e del merzo in poi nella costruzione,sempre per conto e utilità del sig.Scarampella,di un violino nuovo al mese e di varie riparazioni ad istrumenti con rinuncia del ricavato sempre a beneficio di lui.

Infine lo stesso sig.Gadda si impegna anche per l'avvenire,e fino a che il sig.Scarampella ne abbia bisogno e ne lo richieda,a versare mensilmente a Profitto di lui l'ordinario compenso di suo d'opera per la costruzione di un violino,nonchè il compenso per quelle piccole riparazioni di istrumenti vari che allo Scarampella facessero comodo di clienti e che il Gadda eseguirà invece di lui così e come ha sempre fatto da marzo in poi.

Letto confermato e sottoscritto.

Scarampella Stefano

Stefano Scarampella

Gadda Gaetano

Lorenzo Stelluto Testimonio

The two pages of the agreement, dated 8 August 1924 and signed (*below*) by Stefano Scarampella and Gaetano Gadda, and witnessed by public official Lorenzo Stelluto

WE CAN PRESUME THAT SCARAMPELLA RETIRED FROM ACTIVE WORK AT THIS MOMENT, AND GADDA PICKED UP THE SLACK

Scarampella workbench, tools and patterns. These are on display at the Chimei Museum in Tainan, Taiwan, which also owns a spectacular collection of stringed instruments by most of the significant makers in the history of the craft.

Getting back to Scarampella and Gadda, we cannot say what the terms of their relationship were before this agreement. We can presume that Gadda had been working for his master since 1919 at the latest. The contract spells out that his responsibilities there include making instruments and attending to repairs. This matter is addressed directly in the body of the agreement.

The act is brief but to the point. For the sum of 2,000 lire, Gaetano was to acquire the workshop and all its contents: 'violin making tools and instruments, including models and moulds in paper, cardboard, wood and tin; of violins, violas and cellos and of parts of the instruments themselves; and including also the benches, vices, clamps, chisels, planes etc., which are currently in his property and in use by Mr Gaetano Gadda' (my translation). This would have included not just the workshop materials crafted and acquired by Scarampella throughout his career but also those he inherited from his brother Giuseppe after the latter's death in 1902.

The next paragraph deals with another interesting matter: that this sum is also payment for all monies that might be owed to Gaetano but not yet recompensed. This includes finished instruments and repairs conducted in the shop. So it covers all work done up until the end of the previous February and, starting that March, the making of one new violin per month. This is a subtle point, but in essence Gaetano was not paying cash; rather, he was renouncing 2,000 lire owed him by Stefano, that sum being the monies owed to the apprentice but not yet paid to him by the master. Finally, Gadda agreed to provide a monthly payment to Scarampella consisting of revenue for one finished violin per month plus miscellaneous repairs.

From this we can infer that Scarampella retired from active work at that moment, and Gaetano picked up the slack, so presumably from this time onwards the shop was Gadda's, and the instruments being made would be labelled as such. However, a key matter is left opaque, and that is the degree to which Gaetano might have been working in this way for Scarampella *before* the agreement was reached.

Those in the trade are very familiar with works of Gaetano and his son being labelled as Scarampella's. Perhaps we should also presume that some of this was actually sanctioned by Scarampella himself: that is, instruments made by the apprentice Gadda were being sold with the label of the master, Scarampella, by Scarampella himself. Since the acquisition included the entire workshop contents, this would also include the labels, making the process of selling 'Scarampellas' that much easier.

In any event, the monthly payments would not go on for very long. Scarampella, presumably feeling his years and probably also suffering from serious illnesses, had no heirs, and so the workshop would have ground to a halt after his death. And this happened fairly soon afterwards, for he died just four months later, on 25 January 1925.

After Scarampella's death, the workshop on via Tazzoli was closed, and Gaetano opened his own workshop on the via Accademia, a few streets away and closer to the centre of town. In 1926 he and his wife moved into the same building as the workshop, at number 19, where he remained for a few years, and while he made several other moves over the rest of his career, for all but a brief period in the late 1940s they appear to have been to other houses on the via Accademia. Those buildings are still extant. ▹

Back of the Scarampella violin shown on page 43

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY CHIMEI FOUNDATION

FIGURE 1a A Scarampella violin made in 1904, when the luthier was 61 years old

FIGURE 1b This 1924 Scarampella violin clearly shows the hand of Gaetano Gadda in its construction

Of course, in the past few decades the trade has been able to distinguish between the works of master and pupil, because they adopt quite different approaches to some matters. In the case of Gadda, there is also the input of another maker that resulted in a distinctive change in his style.

Scarampella's work has always struck me as being rough but also rapid and concise, much like the makers who preceded him in Brescia in the 17th century. Gadda's craftsmanship, on the other hand, is always neater and the surfaces are smoother than those of his teacher.

A few examples show this transition rather clearly. Looking at a violin of 1904 (**figure 1a**), we see Scarampella's usual model and wood selection. His edging shows a gentle hollow, with the peak very close to the outer edge, something learnt perhaps from his brother Giuseppe, who in turn had French training. All carved surfaces show evidence of toolmarks not having been cleaned up, especially the scroll, whose tail ends in a flat triangular section rather than the neat central ridge running straight to the end. The f-hole wings are roughly done in a few quick gestures. Along the ribs, there is ample evidence of his toothplane having left straight parallel scratches, many not having been removed or covered with diagonal scraper marks. The same sense of roughness is generally quite obvious when inspecting the interiors as well.

We can contrast this instrument with a very late example of 1924 (**figure 1b**) in which Gaetano Gadda played a significant role in the construction. The model is similar, but the overall finish is markedly neater. The purfling lacks the typical irregularities and cracks one sees in Scarampella's purfling. The edging is done in Scarampella's manner, but the hollow leading to the outside edge is much deeper and more accentuated. Similarly the scrolls, in Gadda's own manner, are more neatly finished, without the toolmarks left so prominently, the surfaces far less hollowed, and the tail finished with a neat central ridge running straight out to the edges. Furthermore, the back usually narrows much more towards the volutes than in the case of his master.

While the ribs show the same sort of squared-off butt joints we see in the master's work, the pupil's joints are more neatly worked and finished, and there is no evidence of the tools used to smooth their surfaces. The same is true of the interior

SCARAMPELLA'S ARCHING RUNS EDGE TO EDGE, WITH ALMOST NO HOLLOWING – QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF GADDA

Scarampella's last home at via Accademia 19 became Gadda's home from 1927 to 1931

ALL VIOLIN PHOTOS JAN RÖHRMANN. HOUSE PHOTO PHILIP KASS

FIGURE 2 This 1924 violin by Gadda has f-holes that show the influence of Pietro Guarneri of Mantua

surfaces. The wood selection, though, is the same variety of *oppio* as one sees on most of Scarampella's late works.

Another distinctive difference comes from the shape of the arching. Scarampella's runs edge to edge, with almost no hollowing. This is quite different from that of Gadda, who always leaves some measure of hollowing around the edges. One of my colleagues at William Moennig & Son used to joke that he could always tell a Scarampella from a Gadda because the C-bout clamps always fell off Scarampellas whereas they stayed firmly in place on Gaddas.

These same qualities are visible in another violin of 1924 made by Gaetano (**figure 2**), this one bearing his own label. This violin, though, employs the Pietro Guarneri-like f-holes that would become more common in his later works.

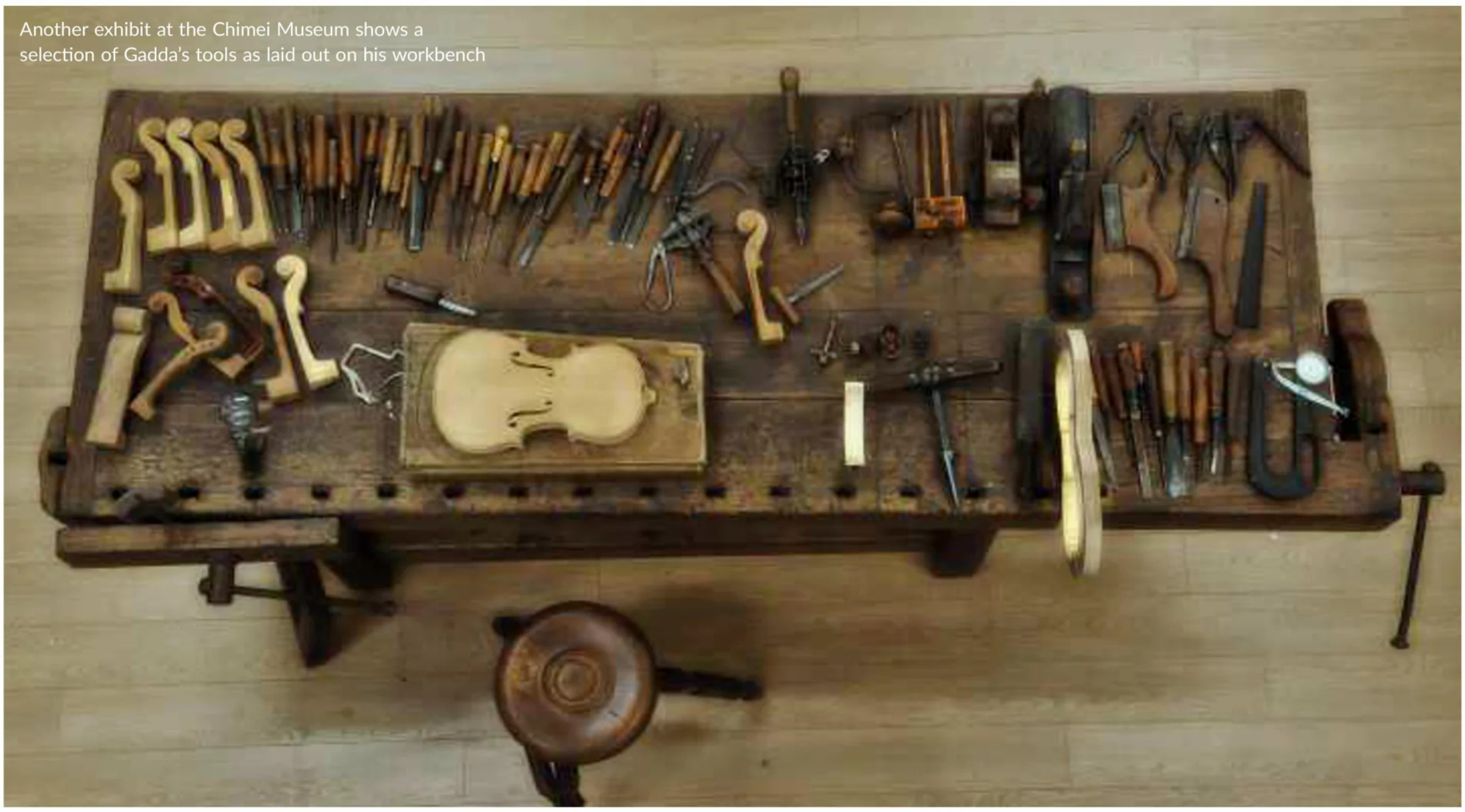
Gadda's style did not remain static, however. Around 1927–8, he is believed to have moved to Ferrara, where for a period he studied under Ettore Soffritti. The facts are not entirely clear, for the family did not give up the via Accademia 19 home during this period. It is also quite possible that these were a commuter's studies, with Gaetano making periodic trips there but always returning home afterwards. We also know that Soffritti made trips to Mantua during these years, for it appears that there was actually a fair bit of commerce in older instruments between the two. It was on one of Ettore's visits to Mantua that he died. On 3 January 1928 he suffered a fatal heart attack while walking between the Gadda workshop and the train station (the exact location appears to have been by the Teatro Sociale on the via Vittorio Emmanuele II). It happened at 2pm; he was rushed to the hospital but pronounced dead several hours later.

The result of the apprenticeship, such as it was, resulted in instruments such as the violin of 1928 (**figure 3**), whose chamfered scrolls, rounded edges, and neat corner joints reveal the influence of the Ferrarese master.

FIGURE 3 Gadda's style continued to evolve, and this 1928 violin also shows the influence of Ettore Soffritti

From this point on, Gadda settled into his final style, a blending of Scarampella's and Soffritti's influences that resulted in the classic instruments that distinguished his work, and that of the Mantuan School going forward. He continued working throughout the Second World War and died on 2 March 1956, just shy of his 56th birthday. In his obituary, the *Gazzetta di Mantova* issued a sympathetic account of his personality, describing him as a modest, hard-working craftsman, in spite of the celebrity he had achieved both at home and abroad, and noting that his annual production of instruments had never exceeded ten per year. The business passed to his son Mario and finally closed on Mario's death on 13 July 2008. And the family style can be seen in the work of their many apprentices who still ply their craft in the vicinity of Mantua. ●

Another exhibit at the Chimei Museum shows a selection of Gadda's tools as laid out on his workbench



VIOLIN PHOTOS JAN RÖHRMANN. WORKBENCH PHOTO CHIMEI FOUNDATION

The Ebsworth Quartet (*l–r*) Elizabeth Hunt, Eleanor Warren, Eileen and Phyllis Ebsworth

FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

In the second and final part of his survey, **Tully Potter** reveals the extent of the explosion of all-female quartets that occurred after the First World War in the UK, Europe, the US and the Soviet Union, as well as notable mixed ones

By the beginning of the First World War, music lovers in Britain were quite used to seeing all-female quartets on the concert platform. Two ensembles were closely involved with the Society of Women Musicians. Helen Egerton formed hers in 1912 with Helen Gough, Sybil Maturin and Edith Hanson, but by 1913 the viola and cello positions had been taken by Dorothy Jones and Gwendolen Griffiths. Rhoda Backhouse (1889–1980), a Quaker who owned the 1702 'Lord Newlands' Stradivari violin from 1921 to 1961, had a piano trio with cellist Felix Salmond and Harold Samuel at the piano, and she founded her quartet in 1919 with Jean le Fevre, Margaret Savory (replaced in 1926 by Rowena Franklin) and Lily Phillips.

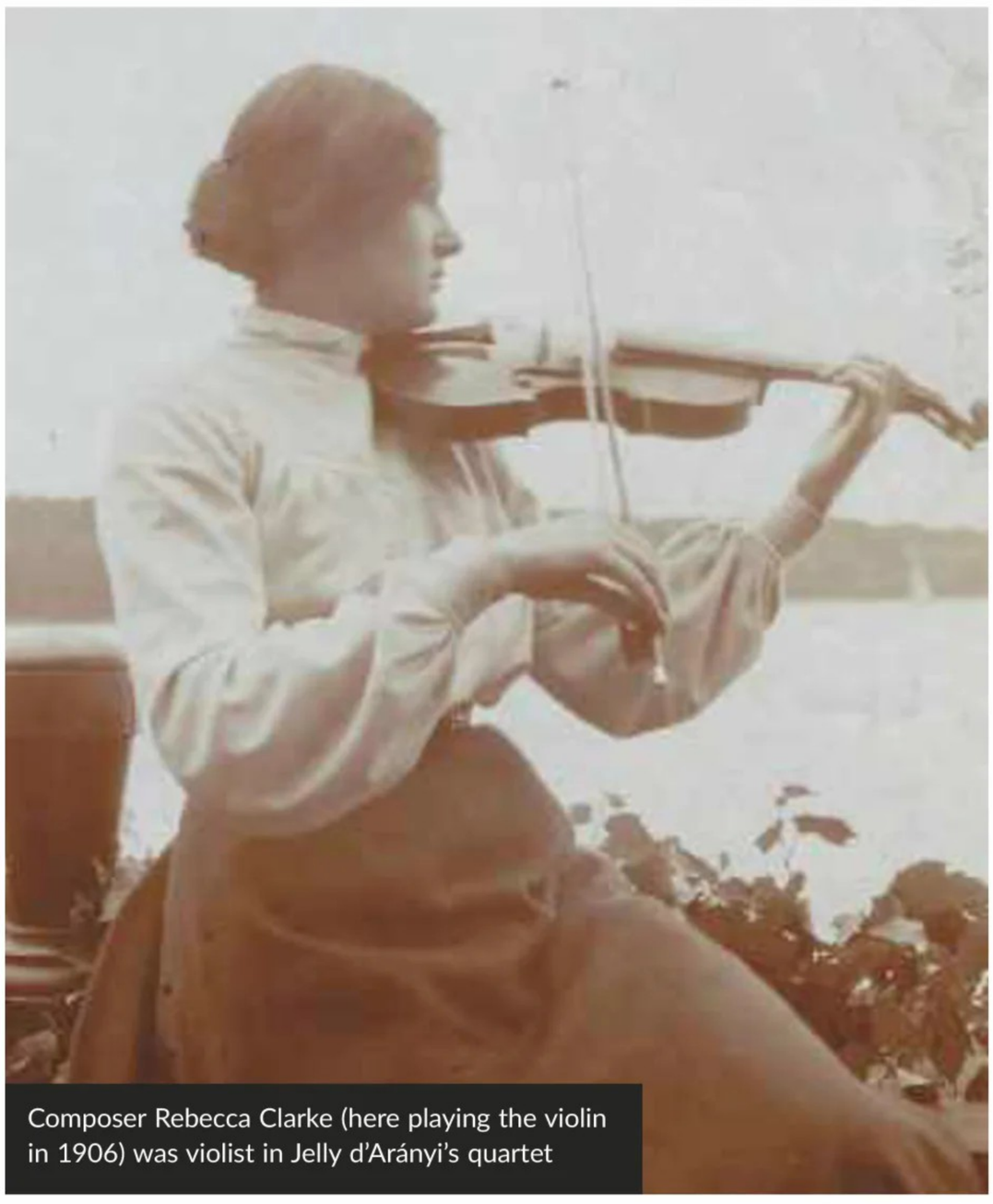
During the war, front-rank musicians Adila Fachiri, Jelly d'Arányi (violinist sisters), Rebecca Clarke and Guilhermina Suggia came together to play quartets. Only Clarke, who had participated in the last months of the Clench Quartet, knew much repertoire, but the foursome took part in Tovey's Classical Concert Society. They gave themselves the title Pro Musica Quartet but were usually listed by their separate names.

Notably well connected – and intrepid – was the Kendall Quartet of London: Katherine Kendall, Marjorie Clemens (from 1922, Dorothy Brook), Dorothy Jones and Edith Hanson. 'The ensemble began [in 1920] by giving small concerts in country villages,' Walter Willson Cobbett tells us in his *Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music* (1929), and Kendall would offer brief introductions to the pieces. The quartet's concerts in the capital were often given under the auspices of such organisations as the League of Arts and the Guild of Singers and Players, and frequently enjoyed the patronage of royalty – the Prince of Wales and especially princesses Mary and Marie Louise. It was the first quartet to play at the Victoria and Albert Museum and appeared at the National Gallery. In 1926 the group took off on a world tour of countries in the old British Empire, giving 110 concerts in ten months and covering more than 40,000 miles. In 1931, with violist Winifred Stiles, the ensemble premiered Elizabeth Maconchy's String Quintet. It appears to have disbanded the following year.

In part one, we met the McCullagh sisters – violinist Isabel and cellist Mary – members of a talented musical clan, in the Edith Robinson Quartet. In Liverpool in 1920 they formed their own McCullagh Quartet, with Gertrude Newsham and Helen Rawdon Briggs taking the inner parts, and they were the city's sole quartet during the interwar years. In March 1921 the group gave its first London recital at Mortimer Hall, playing Nováček's E flat major Quartet, joining pianist-composer Joseph Holbrooke in his G minor Piano Quintet and accompanying baritone John Goss in songs. In 1923 the players introduced the revised version of Walton's First Quartet, with a scherzo added, at the Royal College of Music, London, on 5 July; they repeated it in Liverpool and took it to the Salzburg Festival in August. In 1927 they marked Beethoven's centenary with a Liverpool ▸

IN 1926 THE KENDALL QUARTET OF LONDON TOOK OFF ON A WORLD TOUR OF THE OLD BRITISH EMPIRE, GIVING 110 CONCERTS IN TEN MONTHS

Violinist and quartet leader Jelly d'Arányi pictured in *The Strad* in 1926



Composer Rebecca Clarke (here playing the violin in 1906) was violist in Jelly d'Arányi's quartet

cycle of all his quartets in six concerts. They also became known for Good Friday performances of Haydn's *Seven Last Words* at Liverpool Cathedral. By 1933, Betty Grundy was second violinist and the quartet was still going strong in 1936.

Another 1920 entrant was the Wayfaring Quartet, led by Dorothea Christison with Rhoda Legge, Dorothy Jones (from 1923, Emily Nicholas) and Valentine Orde; they broke up in 1924 on Christison's marriage, but in the 1930s Christison, Jones and Orde played in the Bessie Rawlins Quartet. Orde (1889–1983) – from the border country and a pupil of Jean Gérardy, Julius Klengel and Camille Delobelle of the Capet Quartet after she left the Royal Academy of Music in London – was a great character. She played in the actress Lena Ashwell's concert parties for the troops during the Great War, became an important conductor and teacher and brought together the Gabrieli Quartet. From 1923, Londoners could hear weekly lunchtime concerts at Christ Church, Westminster, given by the Westminster Quartet (Dorothy Ewens, Phyllis Newton, Ada Stuart and Dorothy Dening), who also gave numerous school recitals and out-of-town performances.

Across the Channel, the interesting Quatuor Capelle arose out of post-war euphoria. Among the most brilliant pupils of Henri Berthelier and Lucien Capet and herself a teacher at the École Normale de Musique in Paris, Fernande Capelle (b.1897) is forgotten now, but she and her colleagues Alice Piantini, Marguérite Lutz and Marika Bernard were close to composers of Les Six. Capelle and Lutz had taken the inner parts in the quartet led by Ravel's friend Hélène Jourdan-Morhange in the closing years of the war, with Adèle Clément as cellist; their own group had barely got started when, in April 1919, it premiered Milhaud's Fourth Quartet at the Concerts Delgrange, Paris. In June it introduced Honegger's First Quartet at the Société Musicale Indépendante – his Violin Sonata no.2 had been dedicated to Capelle – and in 1933 the quartet revived his *Pâques à New York* with the mezzo Jane Bathori. The musicians also worked with Auric, Germaine Tailleferre (*below*, the only female member of Les Six) and Poulenc. They occasionally came to London, broadcasting for the BBC in 1924 and 1936, and returning in 1952.

The German-speaking lands had their entities, notably the Bentz Quartet in Berlin and the Riele Queling Quartet in Cologne, which both started in 1922, and four Viennese groups, the Weiss, Kolbe, Alberdingk and Steinbauer quartets – all active by the time of Beethoven's centenary in 1927.

Beatrice Bentz (1895–1976) and her original colleagues Hilde Schirmer, Agnes Ritter and Lena von Hippel were trained by the great quartet leader Karl Klingler. Riele Queling (1897–1980), like Grete Eweler a pupil of Adolf Busch's teacher Bram Eldering, led the Cologne Chamber Orchestra. She and her colleagues Lotte Hellwig-Josten, Gerda van Essen and Ilse Bernatz made beautiful records in 1939, including the complete 'Lark' Quartet by Haydn, his 'Emperor' variations, the Cavatina from Beethoven's op.130 and the second movement from Tchaikovsky's op.11. The ensemble dissolved in 1943.

The four Viennese ensembles knew each other. Herta Schachermeier-Martini (violin/viola) and Lotte Hammerschlag (viola) played at different times with both the Kolbe and the Weiss quartets, cellist Frieda Krause was with both the Weiss and the Steinbauer, Erny Alberdingk-Walter was with the Kolbe Quartet for a while, and Edith Steinbauer was the Weiss's violist in the 1930s while leading her own group. Like Bentz, Margarethe Kolbe (1890–1974) was a proponent of new music: her quartet originated in 1912, and the 1920s line-up gave numerous premieres. Alberdingk-Walter (1892–1961), an Arnold Rosé and Carl Flesch protegée, led two groups: one before her 1920 marriage to organist Karl Walter, an ensemble that gave troop concerts in the war; the other with Tina

VALENTINE ORDE PLAYED FOR THE TROOPS IN THE GREAT WAR AND BECAME AN IMPORTANT CONDUCTOR AND TEACHER

STEINBAUER PHOTO TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

The Steinbauer Quartet in its 1920 iteration (*standing, l–r)* Herta Schachermeier-Martini, Maria Capellmann, Hilde Folger-Lobe (*seated*) Edith Steinbauer

Koppensteiner – who soon gave way to Lissy Sieber – and the Wimmer sisters Hilde and Luitgard, which ran from 1925 to the early 1930s, specialising in Reger and making many broadcasts. Lily Weiss's group toured the most, coming to Britain several times and broadcasting for the BBC. Steinbauer (1901–96) was an exceptional artist whose quartet outlived the other three, lasting into the post-war era. In 1949 she became the first female professor at what is now the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna and taught many members of the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and its concert wing the Vienna Philharmonic, while being excluded from both ensembles herself! She also had a viol consort – among guitarist and lutenist Julian Bream's earliest records were Dowland songs made with the Golden Age Singers and Steinbauer's consort.

In 1936, Hammerschlag (1904–2005) joined the Palestine Orchestra; but in 1938 she followed her conductor husband Carl Bamberger to New York, worked in Busch's chamber orchestra and played in the Busch Quartet through the 1943–4 season, the sole woman to be so honoured – moreover, she maintained the tradition of a Viennese violist in the legendary ensemble. The Bambergers' New York apartment became a haven for musicians to play *Hausmusik* as a relaxation from their stressful careers.

The first female quartet to record a complete work on disc was the Marie Wilson Quartet, founded in 1925 with Gwendolen Higham, Anne Wolfe and Phyllis Hasluck. They played Bax's G major Quartet at Wigmore Hall in March 1929 (with the Delius and Haydn's 'Sunrise'), and a year later recorded it for the National Gramophonic Society (*right*). Marie Wilson (1903–96) and her colleagues were regular broadcasters from 1927, and in 1930 she and Wolfe became founder members of the BBC SO. Wilson was made sub-leader and often led the orchestra. Her quartet was still active after the war.

Three influential British ensembles launched in 1931. Isolde Menges (1893–1976) started out leading three men but soon had at least one other woman in her group – and once Jean Stewart became violist in 1941, there were three. Irish violinist Anne Macnaghten (1908–2000) had an even wider grassroots influence, in keeping with her strong left-wing sympathies. A pupil of d'Arányi, she was much impressed by Busch, whom she met in 1927 during her Leipzig studies. Her quartet consisted of women until 1937 but suffered many changes. Her London-based Macnaghten Concerts, founded with conductor Iris Lemare and composer Elisabeth Lutyens, ran in conjunction with the ensemble and introduced a wide range of British music, championing women composers. The indefatigable

The Macnaghten Quartet (*l–r*) Anne Macnaghten, Elise Desprez, Olive Richards, Phyllis Ebsworth

Birmingham Ladies' Quartet was led by Muriel Tookey (pupil of Flesch, Paul Beard and Arthur Catterall), with Dorothy Hemming, Lena Wood and sister Elsa Tookey. The group brought much fine music to the Midlands and in the 1930s was a regular broadcaster.

England was becoming a happy hunting ground for female quartets. In 1937 the Ebsworth sisters, Eileen (violin) and Phyllis (viola), pupils of the redoubtable Editha Knocker, formed a London ensemble with Elizabeth Hunt as second violinist and Eleanor Warren as cellist. Not content with her younger sister's group, Phyllis also played in Macnaghten's quartet until the Second World War broke out. In 1940, the sisters helped found the Circle of International Art, to give refugee musicians the chance to meet and perform: sessions were held every Sunday afternoon in the Ebsworth Quartet's studio in Hampstead, north London, despite air raids and a barrage balloon site in the garden of the house.

The Ebsworth Quartet first broadcast in 1940, and during the war it was reserved by CEMA (the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts) to play in factories, in army and RAF camps and in air raid shelters, and they appeared many times at Myra Hess's National Gallery concerts. Warren wed conductor Walter Susskind in 1943, and when she had her son, Joy Hall took over as cellist for a time – Jean Layton (later Eisler) similarly filled in for Hunt. The quartet lasted into the early 1950s. Warren, who after 1945 furthered her studies with Pierre Fournier and Pablo Casals, became a BBC producer. Phyllis Ebsworth taught the violin and coached quartets for Benslow Music Trust. Eileen continued her chamber music career into the 1960s.

Rewinding to the 1927–8 season at the Royal Academy of Music in London, we find ensemble professor Lionel Tertis coaching the McDonald Quartet (Phyllis McDonald, ▹

CELLIST ELEANOR WARREN, WHO STUDIED WITH PIERRE FOURNIER AND PABLO CASALS, BECAME A BBC PRODUCER

MACNAGHTEN PHOTO TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

Zorian Quartet (*l–r*) Olive Zorian, Eleanor St George, Maureen Flinn, Joy Hall

Adna Ryerson, Winifred Copperwheat and Joan Mulholland) to play the entire corpus of 68 Haydn quartets, in chronological order, on Thursday afternoons in Duke's Hall – an astonishing feat. Violist Copperwheat, despite her small stature, could handle a large viola and later was among the first devotees of the Tertis–Richardson model (she had no.4). In 1942 she became the internal combustion engine of the remarkable Zorian Quartet, which blazed a trail for British chamber music over seven short years. Leader Olive Zorian (1916–65) was integral to the UK scene for 25 years, with a repertoire ranging from the Renaissance to contemporary music. Trained at the royal colleges in her native Manchester and in London and counting Catterall, George Enescu and Szymon Goldberg among her teachers, she founded her quartet in 1942: Marjorie Lavers was second violinist and Norina Semino cellist. Like the Ebsworth, the group toured widely to boost wartime morale. It made its first broadcast in December 1942, and in March 1943 premiered Tippett's Second Quartet at Wigmore Hall, giving it several other airings that year including a broadcast in April. It made two attempts to record the work for Decca, in June 1945 (unpublished) and December 1947, when the version that still sounds superb was produced. Also close to Britten, the group premiered his Second Quartet at Wigmore Hall in November 1945, the 250th anniversary of the death of Purcell, a major influence on the work. For its HMV recording in November 1946, it set down Purcell's *Fantasia upon One Note* as a filler, persuading Britten to play the sustained C – his sole viola record. The Zorian Quartet disbanded in 1949; they had trouble getting the best work when men returned from the services and the Amadeus Quartet was formed. The Zorian began again in the 1950s with another female line-up, but soon had to admit men.

British-based Australian violinist Margot MacGibbon (1906–98) had a quartet just before the Second World War with Evelyn Ruegg (later Jessie Stewart), Olive Davidson and Peers Coetmore (future wife of Moeran); but she really got going in 1947 with Ruth Fourmy, Muriel Tookey and Lily Phillips. By 1953, Lorraine du Val was second violinist and Jean Stewart violist; and for a decade (1958–68), Anatole Mines was in the viola seat. Also during this era (1950–73), the long-running English Quartet was led by Ruth Pearl, then from 1957 by the great Nona Liddell (*right*), with Lesley White (later Marilyn Taylor), Marjorie 'Bunty' Lempfert (daughter of former leader Marjorie Hayward) and Helen Just. Both these ensembles were much appreciated by Britain's wide-ranging network of music clubs.

ZORIAN PHOTO TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

THE REMARKABLE ZORIAN QUARTET BLAZED A TRAIL FOR BRITISH CHAMBER MUSIC OVER SEVEN SHORT YEARS

There have been quite a few Amati quartets, but the one founded in Los Angeles in 1955 was unusually promising, especially (in a remarkable example of nominative determinism) being led by Jeannette Violin, wife of violinist and conductor Mischa Violin. The second violinist was Mary Laporte (married to Lucien, Paganini Quartet cellist), Maxine Johnson was the violist and Marie Manahan (aka Marie Fera) the cellist.

The Lafayette Quartet (*l–r*) Sharon Stanis, Pamela Highbaugh Aloni, Anne Elliot-Goldschmidt, Joanna Hood

Kaprálova Quartet (*l–r*) Simona Hečová, Veronika Panochová, Eva Krestová, Simona Hurníková

THE GREATEST TRIBUTE ONE CAN PAY TO THE FEMALE QUARTET PIONEERS IS THAT NOWADAYS NO ONE TURNS A HAIR WHEN ANOTHER GROUP EMERGES

They got off to a good start, *inter alia* introducing László Lajtha's Ninth Quartet and playing works by Henry Hadley and Miklós Rósza. Alas, by the time the group made its New York debut in 1963, only Johnson remained of the founders; Shirley Marcus was second violin and the other two players were men.

Of the same vintage was the Quatuor Margand of Paris, which had Michèle Margand and Claudine Lasserre at the top and bottom of the range from 1957 into the 1980s, and maintained an exclusively female line-up. In its first year, it won the Grand Prix in Joseph Calvet's class at the Paris Conservatoire. Among its recordings, I especially love Saint-Saëns's two quartets, released c.1985 by the line-up of Margand, Brigitte Roth, Sylvie Vesterman and Lasserre: here is the true French style, so easy to recognise, so hard to achieve.

Amati Quartet of Los Angeles (*l–r*) Jeannette Violin, Mary Laporte, Maxine Johnson, Marie Manahan

LAFAYETTE PHOTO FRANCES LITMAN. KAPRÁLOVÁ PHOTO DANIEL HAVEL. AMATI PHOTO TULLY POTTER COLLECTION

In the Soviet Union, the hegemony of male quartets was not broken until 1957, when Ella Brakker, Nadezhda Baikova, Galina Odinets and Kira Tsvetkova founded the Prokofiev Quartet of Moscow. The group became known in the West through its recordings, including Bartók's op.7 (released 1961). By the time it made its outstanding LP of Prokofiev's two quartets, the violinists were Polina Guberman and Ludmila Granova; and altogether a dozen women played in the group, maintaining a superb standard. In the 1980s the Russian Quartet emerged: Tatiana Berkul, Maria Suchkova, Elena Ozol and Ludmila Krushkova. Pupils of David Oistrakh and violist Fyodor Druzhinin among others, they had success both at home and abroad: their excellent Borodin and Prokofiev recordings were published on CD in the West (1997 and 2000 respectively). In 1995 another bastion fell when the great Czech tradition acquired a female ensemble, the Venus Quartet – wisely renamed after the composer Vítězslava Kaprálová in 2000 and still active.

I mentioned Tutter Givskov and Pina Carmirelli in the introduction to my first article in this survey, but many other first-rate women players have led quartets: Maud Powell and Miriam Fried in the US, Kathleen Parlow in Canada, Gunna Breuning-Storm in Denmark, Stefi Geyer in Switzerland, Marie-Ange Henry in France. Since the 1960s, female quartets have proliferated and the greatest tribute one can pay to the pioneers is that nowadays no one turns a hair when another group emerges. One recalls so many of these dedicated women from over the years, among them the Colorado Quartet in the US, the Sorrel Quartet in the UK (which left us such satisfying Elgar recordings) and the Lafayette Quartet in British Columbia, which stopped playing in August 2023 after 37 years with the same personnel, a record for a female string quartet. Their careers rested on so much more than their skills as musicians – their abilities to get along together and reason things out could be studied by some of the men who keep getting the world into a mess! ●

THE DARING DOZEN

The conductorless string orchestra 12 Ensemble is celebrating its twelfth birthday with a new album, *Metamorphosis*. Founder members Max Ruisi and Eloise-Fleur Thom speak to **David Kettle** about the repertoire, and recording in London's famous Abbey Road Studios

'We put the piece on a pedestal for a long time – Eloisa and I both felt that, in the particular way we make music, it could be something really special. But we hadn't felt ready. Also, we didn't have the money to get 23 string players together…'

Max Ruisi, cellist in London-based string group the 12 Ensemble, is talking about Richard Strauss's *Metamorphosen*, the darkly emotional centrepiece of the group's new album, *Metamorphosis* – and a work that the musicians have wanted to tackle for some time. Indeed, it's a sign of the 12 Ensemble's longevity – Ruisi and violinist Eloisa-Fleur Thom co-founded the group twelve years ago, and continue as co-artistic directors – that a long-considered project has finally come to fruition.

The ensemble is now firmly established in the capital and beyond: its first two albums, *Resurrection* (2018) and *Death and the Maiden* (2020), were warmly received; it's been house band for Oliver Leith's opera *Last Days* at the Royal Opera House's Linbury Theatre (2022); and it's currently an ensemble-in-residence at Wigmore Hall.

But still, embarking on *Metamorphosen* feels like another thing entirely, especially with the 12 Ensemble's well-rooted conductorless ethos. 'We often get asked what we've got against conductors,' Ruisi laughs. 'Absolutely nothing, in fact – we just have a different way of working. We come at music as if we were a big string quartet, and make decisions within the group.'

'WE COME AT MUSIC AS IF WE WERE A BIG STRING QUARTET, AND MAKE DECISIONS WITHIN THE GROUP' – *MAX RUISI, CELLO*

That posed particular challenges, however, with a work on as large a scale as *Metamorphosen*, with its 23 solo parts (which expanded the Ensemble way beyond its customary twelve-strong team). 'We knew what a task it would be, and we performed it live several times before the recording. It's sometimes tough and time-consuming to discuss, for example, one particular player's views on one particular bar. But it's absolutely worth it because every musician feels invested in the performance, and everyone has thought about every note.'

Recording the Strauss for posterity still came with inevitable responsibilities, however, as Ruisi and Thom admit. 'You're laying it down for everyone to hear,' explains Thom. 'But we always try to treat the recording sessions like concerts anyway, with takes that are as long as we can manage. In the past, we've done whole movements with no edits in them.' There are practical considerations to this way of working, too. 'When you haven't got a conductor, you're so reliant from the intense sense of flow you get from all the players, but that can be exhausting,' admits Ruisi.

Metamorphosen also supplies the new recording's underlying themes of change and transformation. How did Ruisi and Thom go about selecting other repertoire to sit alongside that iconic piece? 'We started thinking about biological metamorphosis, natural things that go through processes of change, and Claude Vivier's *Zipangu* seemed to fit into that idea,' explains Ruisi. 'There's something about it that feels like it's always evolving – it takes one melody and just churns it through this spectral grinder of weirdness.'

The Canadian composer's 1980 piece does indeed offer a deeply strange listening experience, drawing on Japanese kabuki theatre and Indian Carnatic music for inspiration, and colliding together a whole catalogue of extended string techniques with long, lush, winding melodies. 'I only discovered the piece about two years ago,' explains Ruisi, 'but I had such a visceral reaction to the music that I thought: wow, we need to record this.' That was, however, before Ruisi and Thom got to grips with the practicalities. 'When we first got the score,' Ruisi recalls,

RAPHAEL NEAL

The 12 Ensemble recording in Studio Two at London's Abbey Road

'I remember us both thinking: oh God, what have we done?'

The journey from conception to recording came down, they remember, to a lot of careful rehearsal and individual practice. 'It's really challenging, and initially the group was obviously thinking: what the hell is this? But they all bought into it and realised that it's a really cool thing,' says Ruisi. It's also an important reflection of the 12 Ensemble's musical identity, they feel. 'We're not a dedicated new-music group – we were recording Strauss at the same time, and we've been playing late Beethoven recently,' Ruisi explains. 'But we're all very committed to exploring new repertoire, and even when we were making some frankly really odd sounds, everyone in the group was invested and took it seriously.'

That should come as little surprise: the 12 Ensemble already has close relationships with several British composers, two of whom – Oliver Leith and Edmund Finnis – provided the shorter pieces that complete the recording. 'It's a valuable connection to have when as a performer you feel you understand their language, and hopefully as composers they feel they can trust us,' explains Thom.

In Finnis's case, the composer himself reworked the penultimate movement of his First String Quartet especially for 12 Ensemble. 'We felt that Ed's music is so beautiful, and a beautiful way to begin an album – each chord is kind of holy and precious,' explains Thom.

'We bumped into him after a performance of the Quartet,' Ruisi continues, 'and told him how much we loved it. Then a few weeks later, a message popped up in our inbox: "thanks for that, and I thought I'd arrange a movement from it for the Ensemble."'

Leith's piece – *Non voglio mai vedere il sole tramontare* – is another reworking, this time of a faux-Italian aria from his opera *Last Days*, with Thom as solo violinist reinterpreting the vocal line. 'We were part of the opera that the piece originally came from,' she explains, 'and playing the solo line, I already had in my mind what I wanted to do with it, knowing the words and the context in the plot.'

Both composers attended the recording sessions – perhaps a stressful presence, although Ruisi and Thom point out that it's far better than sending out audio files and waiting for feedback. 'There were no big shocks, because we work closely with them anyway,' Ruisi explains. 'We did a first take of Ollie's piece and he said: "absolutely fantastic". But we convinced him we maybe ought to do another one, and he said: "well, fine, if you really want to". Ed's a bit more precise about things, but even when it got to the editing process, it was just a case of fine-tuning a few little corners.'

The sessions took place across two days in April 2023, in one of the world's most iconic recording venues: Abbey Road Studios. 'It was a bit of a pinch-me moment, to be honest,' Ruisi smiles. 'We'd been there quite a few times recording film scores and things like that, but it's something different to go in with your own project.'

But the venue only added to the excitement of the project as a whole; one emphasised by the closeness of all involved. 'We were lucky to be collaborating again with our producer, Matthew Bennett, who worked on our last album,' explains Thom. 'When you have someone you trust, it makes what can be quite a complex experience very positive.'

And, according to Ruisi and Thom, it was a surprisingly smooth one too. 'We started with the Vivier, to make sure we were on top of it,' Ruisi admits. 'We were prepared for a really gruelling session, but we actually finished ahead of time. Then we could start fresh the next day with the Strauss, and again we managed to wrap early. There was something special about the sessions – I think in sports they call it a purple patch, when everything just magically aligns.'

So much so, in fact, that it was only later that the players realised just how draining the sessions had been. 'We were going at every take with a lot of energy,' Ruisi remembers. 'It's almost like when there's a crisis and you find a kind of superhuman strength. It was only when we got home in the evening that we realised how absolutely exhausted we were. But we were really touched by the number of players who emailed us afterwards to say how much the experience had reminded them about why they wanted to be musicians in the first place.'

WORKS **Finnis** Hymn (after Byrd) **Vivier** Zipangu **Leith** Non voglio mai vedere il sole tramontare **Strauss** Metamorphosen
ARTISTS **12 Ensemble**
RECORDING VENUE **Abbey Road Studio Two, London, UK**
RECORDING DATES **5–6 April 2023**
CATALOGUE NUMBER **Platoon STUDIOXII-01**
RELEASE DATE **1 March 2024**

BRANDON SHEER

ELIAS PLACHT

FATHER *of a* TRADITION

By the early 20th century, the town of Schönbach was producing tens of thousands of violins per year – but the industry began with just one man. **Christian Hoyer** sifts through the records to reveal the life and legacy of Elias Placht

The year 2023 marked 300 years since the first documented mention of violin making in Schönbach. The town, now called Luby and part of the Czech Republic, was the first centre of violin making in Bohemia, and the most successful with around 150,000 violins being produced annually in the early 20th century. Following the Second World War, Schönbach's German artisans were expelled from the town and moved to Bubenreuth in Bavaria, where their instrument making was encouraged; Bubenreuth remains Schönbach's twin town. However, until recently the origins of its solid violin making tradition have always been shrouded in mystery.

Hans Gügel's 1951 monument to Elias Placht still stands in Bubenreuth

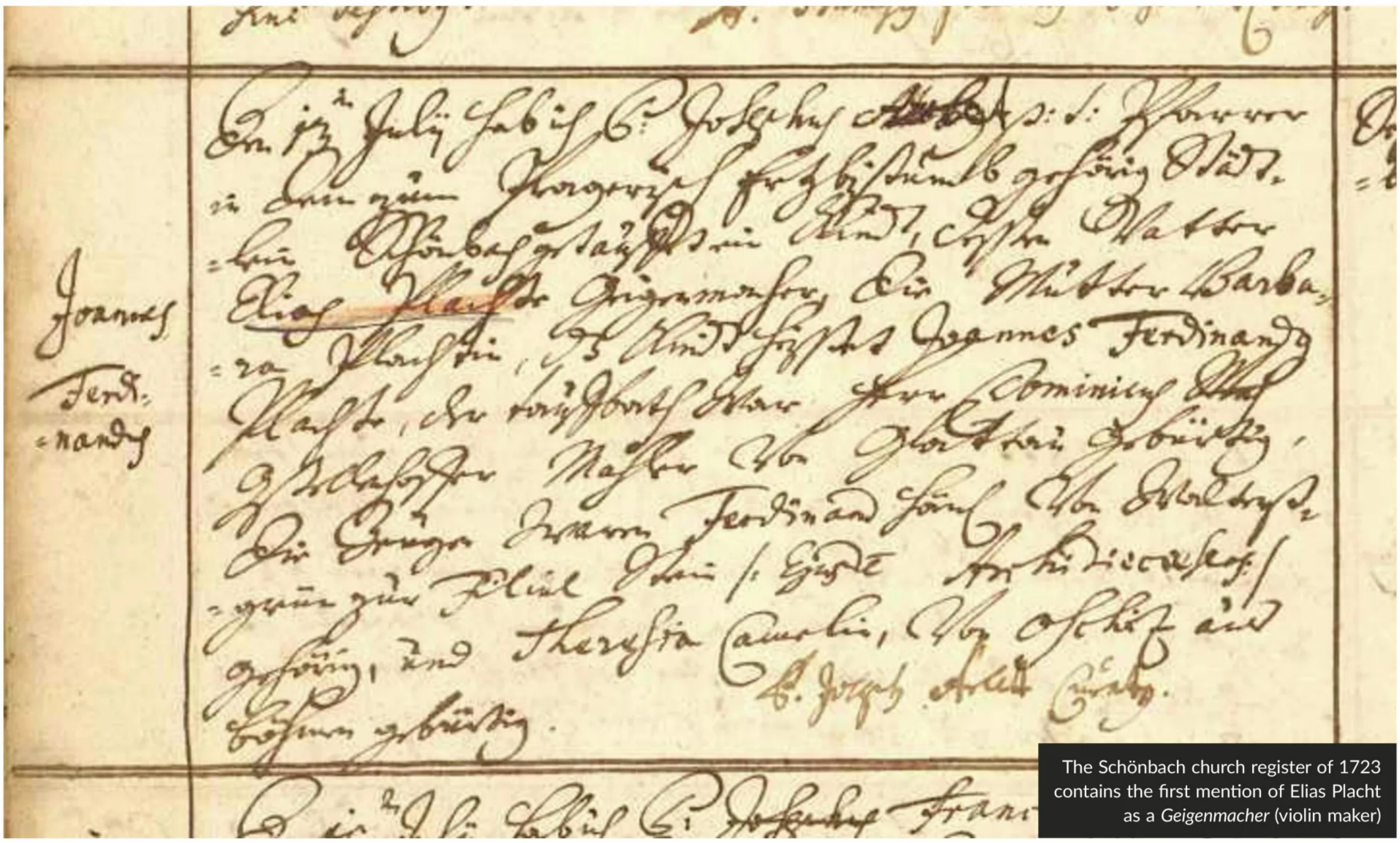
The first mention of a violin maker in the town's annals dates from 1723: specifically the Schönbach baptismal register for 13 July of that year, with the baptism of Johannes Ferdinand Placht. His father, Elias Placht (spelt 'Plachte' in the register), was listed on that date as a *Geigenmacher* (violin maker). Today, Placht has both a street and a monument named after him in Bubenreuth; however, no instrument has yet come to light that can be attributed to him.

In fact, the cradle of violin making in this region, which later became known as the 'Saxon–Bohemian music corner', was not in Schönbach but around six miles away in the neighbouring town of Graslitz (now Kraslice). One Johannes Artus was mentioned in the Graslitz records as a painter and 'instrument maker' as early as 1610. In 1631 a Melchior Lorenz was mentioned explicitly as a 'violin maker'. Less than two generations later, in 1669, the violin makers of Graslitz came together to form a guild. In the following years, many of the guild members turned their backs on Bohemia for religious reasons, and immigrated to nearby Saxony – many of them to Markneukirchen in the Vogtland region. In the 1677 records of the newly founded violin makers' guild there, we find the names of most of Graslitz's violin makers. Graslitz eventually became a centre for wind instrument makers in the 19th century.

It should be mentioned in passing that one of the guild members in Markneukirchen was Johann Adam Pöpel, whose instruments still survive: the Germanic National Museum in Nuremberg and Markneukirchen's Musical Instrument Museum both own a viola by him. There is something to be said for the theory that Pöpel began his career in Schönbach; there was, for instance, an Adam Pöpel born in Schönbach around 1651. However, he neither trained any students nor established a violin making tradition there, and would have remained a unique outlier in the town. Even in 1580 there was not a single violin maker in Schönbach or in the rest of the 'music corner', according to popular legend.

The real Schönbach violin making tradition began with Elias Placht. He, his sons and their students were the origins of a continuous line of luthiers up to the present day. Placht was not a native of Schönbach but came from northern Bohemia; the 1721 register states he is *sonsten zu Niemes gebürtig* ('otherwise a native of Niemes', now Mimoň in the Czech Republic). It is curious that Schönbach's first violin maker was not only a stranger to the area but also came from far away, especially considering that violin makers had ▹

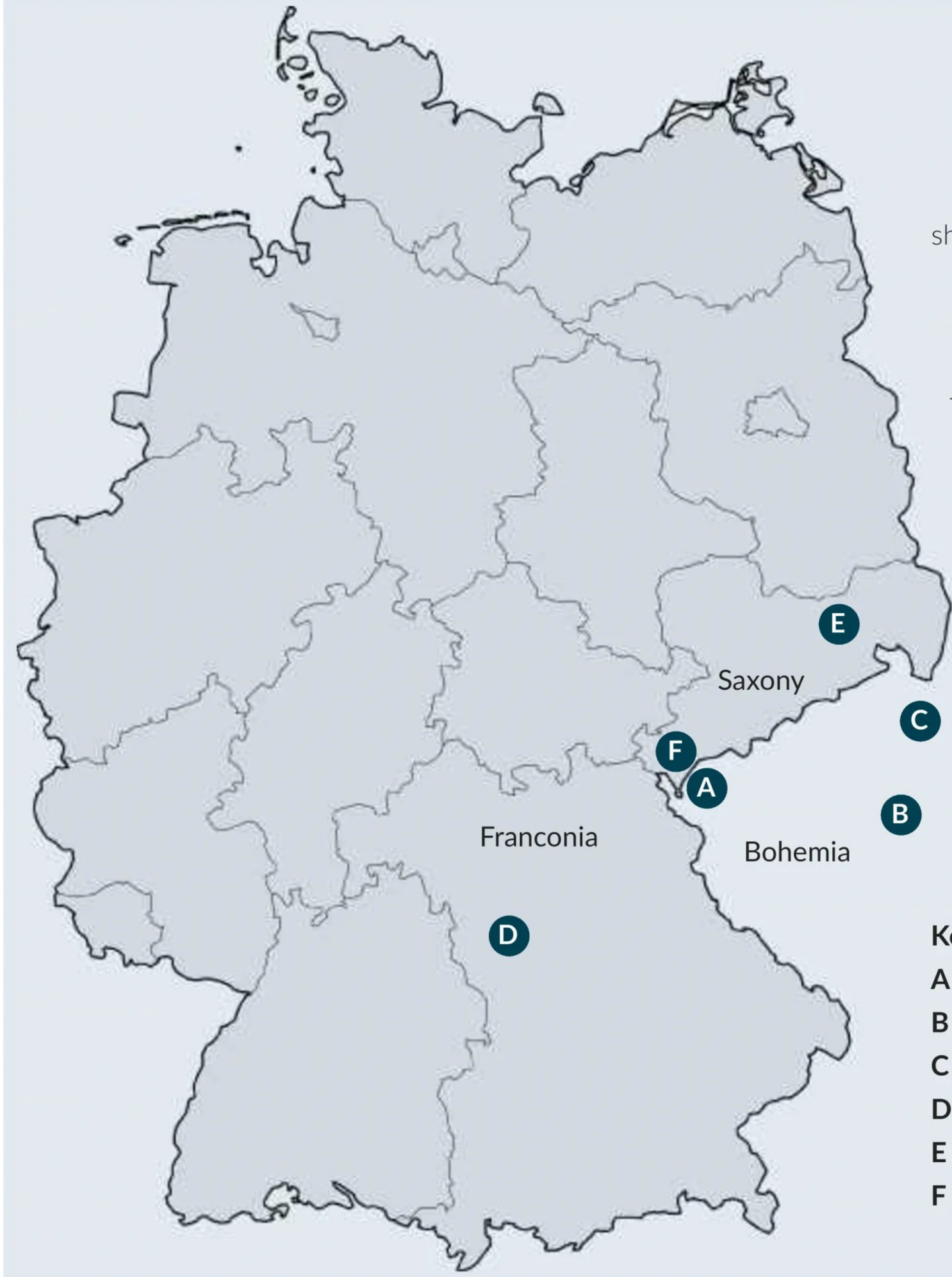
PLACHT, HIS SONS AND THEIR STUDENTS WERE THE ORIGINS OF A CONTINUOUS LINE OF LUTHIERS UP TO THE PRESENT DAY



The Schönbach church register of 1723 contains the first mention of Elias Placht as a *Geigenmacher* (violin maker)

PILSEN/PLZEN REGIONAL ARCHIVES

THE TRAVELS OF ELIAS PLACHT



This map shows some of the key towns and cities in the life of Elias Placht and his sons. The outlines show the modern-day German states for ease of reference; the region of Franconia at the time encompassed parts of modern-day Bavaria, Thuringia and Baden-Württemberg.

Key

A Schönbach (now Luby)
B Prague
C Niemes (now Mimoň)
D Ansbach
E Dresden
F Markneukirchen

existed in the region for around a century already. Placht was probably born in 1673 in the small village of Böhmisch Neuland near Mimoň, about 60 miles north of Prague and 95 miles north-east of Schönbach.

Little is known about Placht's life. Willibald Lütgendorff wrote in 1904 that he was initially a forester, but this is certainly incorrect. What is certain is that he served as a soldier in a regiment belonging to the Ansbach margrave, a military commander who rented out his troops in exchange for subsidies. These troops saw action in the Great Northern War (1700–21), in which they were loaned out to Augustus II 'the Strong', who was based in Dresden. The records of the Ansbach margrave are unfortunately lost, but luckily the people of Dresden kept their own precise details of the soldiers they rented, and this part of the army is well documented in Saxony's main state archive.

In 1715 a recruitment drive was held in the town of Lübben, and among the regiment's personnel we find an 'Elias Blach', native of 'Nimsch in Böhmen'. The recruitment list also tells us that Placht had already been recruited in 1699 in the town of Ansbach, Franconia, and had served as a *Jäger* (rifleman) for a good 16 years. This means he served in the light infantry. Riflemen operated in smaller units and loose formations, in order to take advantage of the terrain and fire shots at selected targets such as enemy officers and gunners. Their role in combat was to make it easier for their own side to deploy troops.

Placht is also mentioned as being already married, and the father of three children. His wife was named Barbara Steinbauer and came from Sachsen, a little village in Franconia, as can be gleaned from a later entry in the Schönbach *Examen Sponsorum* (a book listing details of brides

and grooms before their marriage). The entry was discovered by the Schönbach chaplain and local historian Alois Tille, who in the 1920s wrote several source-based essays with other local historians. These refuted the old wives' tales of the region and made great headway in discovering the real origins of violin making in Schönbach. Tille made a great contribution to the town's history, and to the rediscovery of Elias Placht.

The 1723 entry in the church register confirms that Elias met Barbara in the lands of the Ansbach margrave, in whose service he joined the army. Barbara's small village, Sachsen an der Altmühl, is not far from Ansbach, and is now part of the town of Leutershausen.

It was not until 1721, when he was over 40 years old, that Elias Placht's name first appeared in a church register in Schönbach. He apparently settled there permanently after completing his active service. The question inevitably arises as to why, after spending so long in the Ansbach margrave's army, he went to Schönbach of all places. Why would he not have returned to his birthplace in northern Bohemia – or settle in his wife's homeland in Franconia? These questions cannot yet be answered conclusively, but there are a few plausible possibilities. First of all, the Schönbach town priest, Josef Arlet (1683–1739) was also a native of Niemes and was most likely a close relative of Placht, possibly his uncle or cousin on his mother's side. Arlet had worked in Schönbach since 1702, initially as a chaplain and from 1712 as the town's priest.

Another important reason for Placht to return to his homeland of Bohemia may have been its strong economic recovery at the time. Since the turn of the century, Bohemia had been experiencing a new period of prosperity, and a spirit of optimism could be felt everywhere. The architecture of the Bohemian Baroque is representative of this development. In Schönbach, too, there was a major construction boom and a noticeable desire for regeneration. To give two examples: in 1715 the Schönbach hospital was renovated and a little later a small hospital church was built. Nineteen years later, in 1734 the municipality dared to renovate the venerable parish church in the Baroque style. Experts were needed for all this work, which is why Josef Arlet brought his compatriot, the Niemes sculptor Johann Franz Henrich (1689–1758), to Schönbach. For the flourishing church music, new instruments were needed to cater for contemporary tastes.

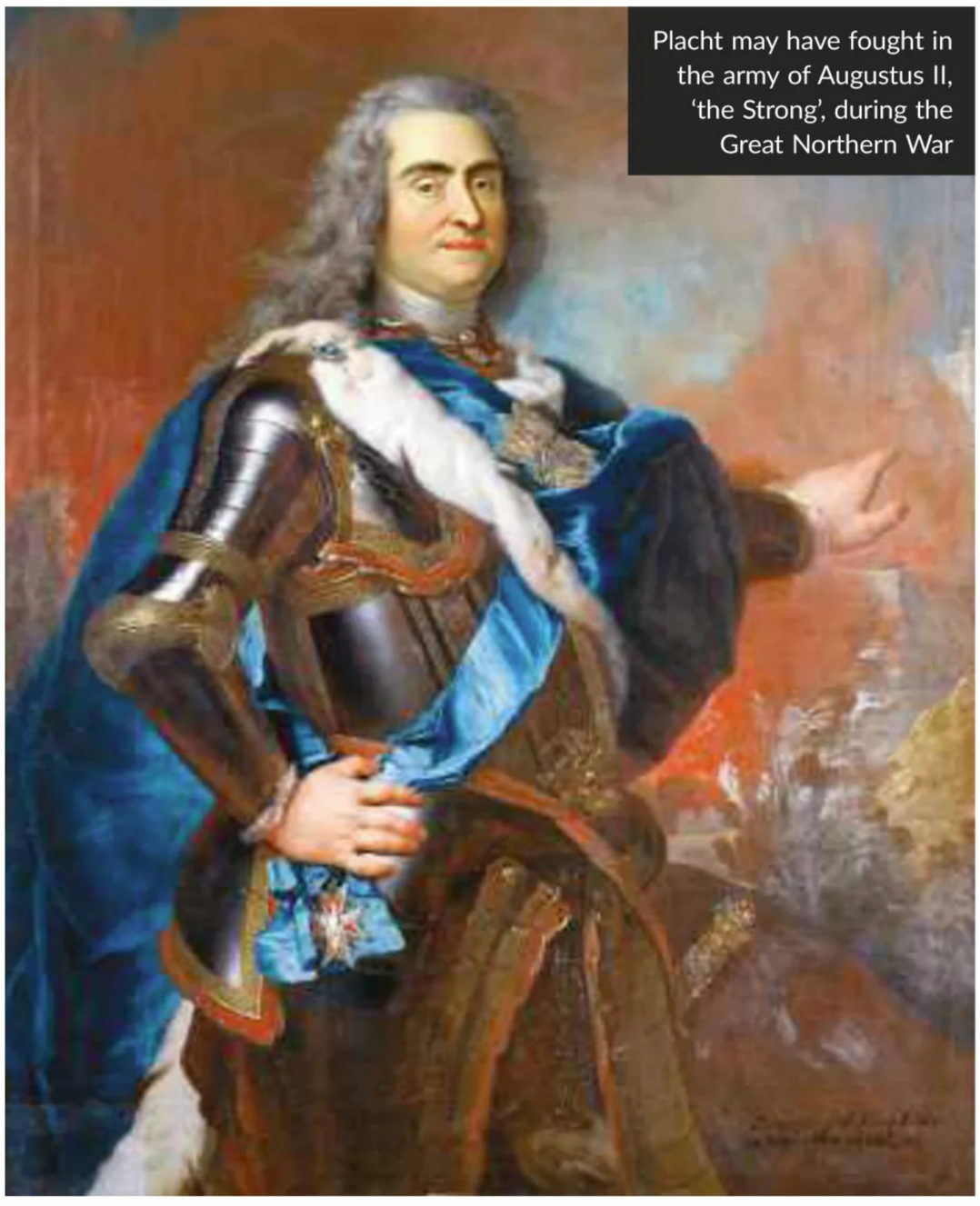
It was during this atmosphere of renewal that Elias Placht came to the small town in western Bohemia, in what was then the Elbogen district. As an ex-soldier he was probably receiving a small pension that could at least serve as basic support for him. His status as a resident of Schönbach was not yet equal to that of the citizens when the first entries appeared in the church register. The baptismal entry of his son Joannes Wenceslaus from 26 June 1721 states merely that he 'lives here in Schönbach'. It is notable that, in addition to the godfather, a second witness is named: Johann Michael Öesterreicher, a teacher from the neighbouring parish of Frauenreuth. At that time, schoolteachers were also entrusted with church music.

Placht is said to have learnt violin making at this time, from a luthier named Götzel in Wernitzgrün – a town in the Vogtland halfway between Markneukirchen and Schönbach. This concentration of expertise in violin making in the

IT WAS NOT UNTIL 1721, WHEN HE WAS OVER 40, THAT ELIAS PLACHT'S NAME FIRST APPEARED IN A CHURCH REGISTER IN SCHÖNBACH

immediate vicinity of the Bohemian border, as well as in Schönbach's neighbour Graslitz, would certainly have been the main reason for Placht to come to Schönbach. If it is true that Placht's teacher was in Wernitzgrün, then Schönbach violin making would have been an offshoot of the Markneukirchen industry – a 're-import' from Saxony back to Bohemia.

It is possible that Placht had already acquired knowledge of violin making elsewhere. As a soldier he travelled around a lot, and got to know both court bands and music making in towns. In addition, soldiers were often dependent on earning extra money on the side, or to bridge the long periods of inactivity. It could be assumed that Placht had taken advantage of the opportunity to help out with instrument making. Maybe he had made friends with someone from the Vogtland during his military service in Saxony. In any case, several Vogtlanders served in his unit and perhaps they had been involved in instrument making. In addition his unit was stationed in Adorf in the Vogtland in the winter of 1714–15. From here, ▹



Placht may have fought in the army of Augustus II, 'the Strong', during the Great Northern War

Viola d'amore by Elias Placht's grandson Johann Franz, on display at the Huntington Museum of Art, WV, US.

he could have visited his relatives in Schönbach, ten miles away, before 1721 and come into contact with the widespread craft of violin making in the region. He must have had an interest and an affinity for the craft and the violin.

When Elias Placht died in Schönbach on 5 March 1737, he was entered in the death register as a 'violin maker from here […] in his 62nd year'. He left behind his wife Barbara and four sons who were also already practising violin making by then: Elias Jr (born before 1721, died 1793), Matthäus Wenzel (born before 1721), Johann Wenzel (1721–1751) and Johann Ferdinand (b.1723). He also had two daughters: Rosina Susanne (b.1726) and Anna Margaretha (b.1728).

In 1868 Josef Placht immigrated to St Louis with his family and set up a musical instrument business

STORE PHOTO CHRISTIAN HOYER COLLECTION

Records from the mid-18th century attest that the makers of Markneukirchen gave lessons to 'Plachte' in Schönbach, who then trained his sons, who in turn perfected their craft even further away in Prague. We know this from the extensive documents pertaining to the so-called *Geigenkrieg* ('Violin War') of 1771. This related to a treaty between Markneukirchen and Klingenthal intended to prohibit the sale of instruments from one town to the other. The treaty was broken multiple times in the decades that followed, and both towns also accused one another of having trained Bohemian apprentices (such as 'Plachte') who then went back to their home country, thus transplanting the trade abroad.

The Schönbach church records from the second half of the 18th century onwards clearly show that violin making was actually progressing well in Schönbach. These records were mostly written in Latin, and we often find the word 'Fidifex' mentioned in the Schönbach registers (*fidis* = string; 'fex' from *facere*, to make). The later Mittenwald pastor obviously preferred 'Plectropeus' as a Latin translation.

Until recently the members of the Placht family in Schönbach and later in Bubenreuth bore the nickname 'Geigerer' so Josef Placht would have been called 'Geigerer-Josef' and so on. In the course of the 18th century, in addition to Placht's sons, there were other Schönbach families who were active in violin making.

RECORDS FROM THE ERA ATTEST THAT IT WAS THE MAKERS OF MARKNEUKIRCHEN WHO GAVE LESSONS TO 'PLACHTE'

A 1920s postcard showing the 'music city' of Schönbach

The Gebrüder Placht firm of string makers was founded in 1825 and operated until 1945

These include names that still resonate today, such as Sandner (first recorded in 1742), Schuster (1761), Hoyer (1762), Fuchs (1780), Siebenhüner (1781), Himmer (1782), Weller (1785), Fritsch (1786), Lustkandl (1787), Schöner (1788), Diener (1789), Klier (1792), Köhler (1793), Schäfer, Winter, Prüller, Fischer (all 1794) and Wilfer (1798).

Elias Placht's biography still has many gaps. The biggest is that no instrument can be attributed either to him or to any of his sons. Currently, the earliest known Placht instrument is a viola d'amore by Johann Franz Placht (born 1746), a grandson of the founding father, which is exhibited in the Huntington Museum of Art in West Virginia, US.

The oldest known instrument from Schönbach is a violin made by Johann Georg Sandner. Based on a dendrochronological age determination of the violin top, the youngest growth ring can be dated to 1748. The Baroque violin was acquired for the collection of the Bubenreuth Museum in 2020. A viola d'amore by the same luthier was made in 1771 and is privately owned.

A 1785 violin by Joseph Anton Schuster was auctioned in 2015 at the Dorotheum auction house in Vienna, and a violin by Johann Andreas Hümmer/Himmer (1758–1836) has been in the Bubenreuth collection since 2016. According to its label the violin was made in 1802, and with further examination and clues from the violin's appearance, this year of manufacture has finally been confirmed.

Research into the beginnings of the Schönbach violin makers is still in its infancy. The hope is that further instruments will become known that are attributed to a family member of the Placht dynasty or another early Schönbach violin maker. If any readers have any information about this, please contact the Bubenreuth Museum or the author of this article: c.hoyer@bubenreutheum.de ●

TRANSLATION BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD

FURTHER READING

Further information and research about Elias Placht and the Schönbach violin makers can be found in the following books, all recently published:

Musikinstrumentenbau in Bubenreuth und Umgebung. Von 1945 bis heute
Christian Hoyer
Bubenreuth, 2020

Verbunden durch Musik und Geschichte. Schönbach / Luby – Markneukirchen – Bubenreuth
Christian Hoyer, Enrico Weller
Markneukirchen, 2021

'Die Schönbacher Geigenbauer. Anmerkungen zu Forschungsstand und Forschungsfragen', in:
Der Streichinstrumentenbau im sächsischen Vogtland
ed. Monika Lustig, Christian Philipsen
Augsburg, 2023

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G.B. GUADAGNINI

WRITTEN BY JOHN DILWORTH

Giovanni Battista Guadagnini is considered the greatest violin maker of the late 18th century. Although long held to have been a pupil of his father, Lorenzo Guadagnini, or even Stradivari – as he himself claimed on his late labels – it now seems most likely that he was to a great extent self-taught, and from the very beginning his instruments have a very distinctive character and exhibit a range of unique quirks of materials and technique that can be attributed to no other master. Born in Piacenza in 1711, Guadagnini travelled across northern Italy throughout his career. From Piacenza he moved to Milan in 1749, then possibly to Cremona briefly in 1758, then to Milan and finally to Turin in 1771.

This exceptional violin was made in the last year of his life, in Turin in 1786, according to the label. It appears to be the unaided work of the elderly Guadagnini.

- MAKER: GIOVANNI BATTISTA GUADAGNINI
- NATIONALITY: ITALIAN
- BORN: 1711
- DIED: 1786
- INSTRUMENT: VIOLIN
- DATE: 1786

MATERIALS

The back is of a single piece of well-figured quarter-sawn maple, with a wing added in the lower bass bout. The front is of two pieces of straight-grained spruce with grain of medium to broad width.

MODEL

Guadagnini's model is surprisingly consistent from the beginning to the end of his career, despite the very different outward appearances, mainly the result of different treatments of the corners and edges. All this seems consistent with the use of an internal mould. The outline bears a passing resemblance to a mid-period Stradivari, most notably in the C-bouts, but differs elsewhere, with a straighter approach to the corners.

CONSTRUCTION

The interior work is also consistent throughout Guadagnini's work. The blocks and linings are of willow, and the linings are mortised deep into the corner-blocks. He utilised pins in the back and front to locate the plates accurately on the ribs, and these are placed well inside the purfling line. The corners are worked thinner than the bouts, and the purfling has been identified as of the white sapwood of walnut.

SCROLL

Guadagnini's scrolls are very distinctive. This example bears the Stradivari-like blackened chamfers, probably at Cozio's suggestion, but they are unevenly laid. The profile of the volute is an upright oval, caused to some extent by the hastily knife-cut fluting of the front face, which has overrun into the edges. Most characteristic are the pinpricks marking out the eyes; Guadagnini must have been aware of this, but never seems to have tried to correct it.

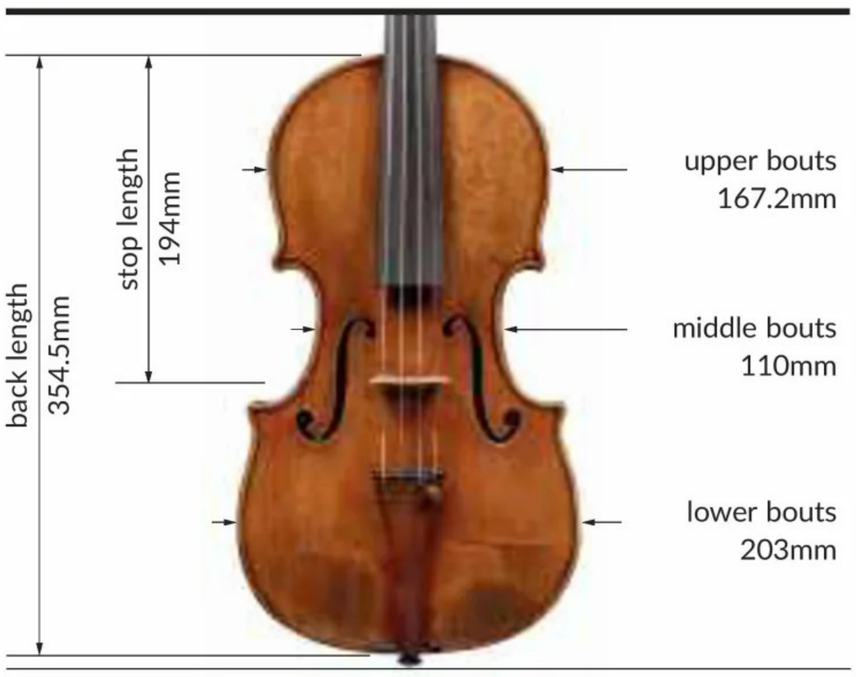
F-HOLES

The f-holes are very large, and seem also to be in the style of late Stradivari. Guadagnini is known for his practice of cutting the eyes of the 'F' to an elongated oval, but here, again possibly at Cozio's suggestion, they are roughly circular but greatly enlarged. Another Stradivarian touch evident in the late violins is the fluting of the lower wings, generally absent from Guadagnini's work.

VARNISH

The varnish is of a beautiful clear orange–brown, laid closely on the wood. The wood surface typically seems to have been wetted and abraded, leaving a burnished rather than scraped surface.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY INGLES & HAYDAY



All measurements taken with callipers

With acknowledgements to Duane Rosengard, whose book Giovanni Battista Guadagnini *is a primary source for all studies of this maker*

Preparing the neck-block

An efficient, accurate method for the earlier parts of neck carving, before working on the scroll

BY KATHARINA NEUMÜLLER
Luthier based in Lenggries, Germany

If you want to work efficiently in violin making, it is inevitable that you will at some point think about the individual work processes. Does a step make sense at a certain point in the process? What is the function of the part in the overall concept? Which is more important: the function or the decoration? How can I achieve the desired result of a particular step in the making process as quickly and safely as possible?

These questions have occupied me for 25 years, during which I have worked almost exclusively and intensively on the manufacturing of new violins, violas and cellos. I learnt many of my working processes in my father's workshop and have refined some of them. I have now carried out the method of neck preparation described here on around 400 scrolls. Perhaps it will inspire some of you to try it.

1a Preparation of the neck-block

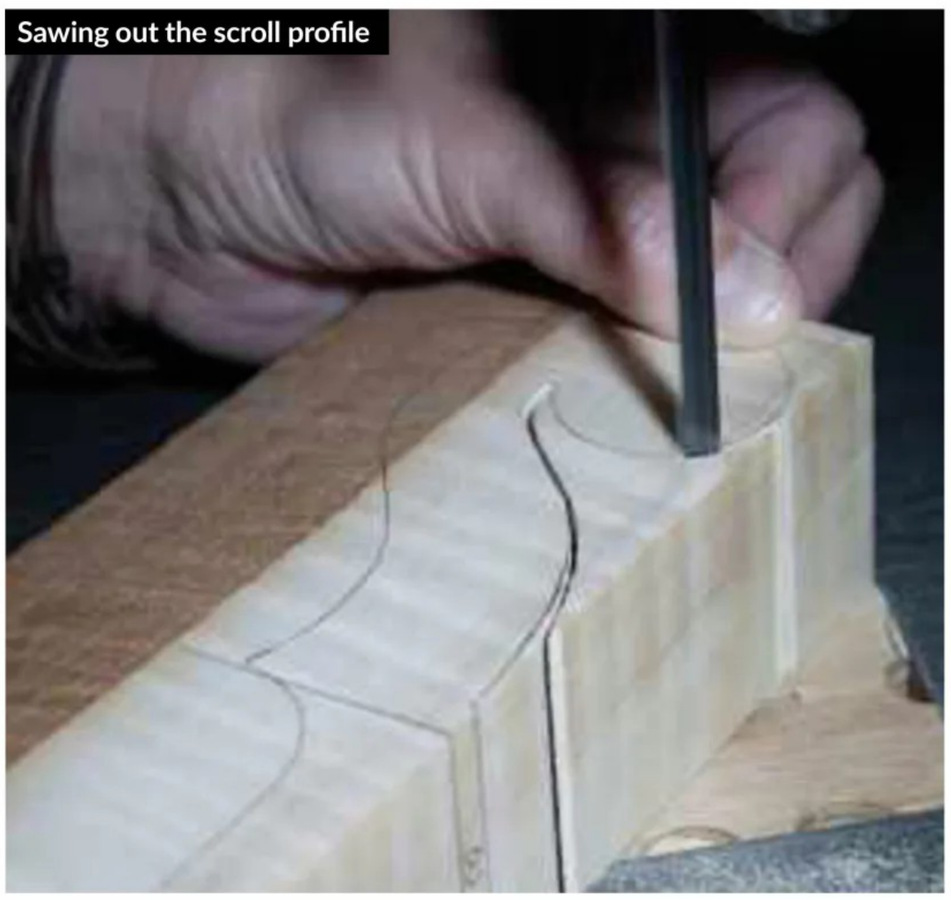
1b The outline is drawn out

1 First I measure the overall length of the neck-block and cut it off with a bandsaw, so I have no unnecessarily large areas to deal with. I work on the fingerboard gluing surface first: I place it on one growth ring and plane the surface flat.

Then I plane one side at a right angle. This surface should be at least wide enough to accommodate the ear of the scroll. I then saw my ear width plus 0.5mm on the bandsaw and plane the sawn surface to the exact ear width (1a). After this, the outline of the neck and scroll can be drawn on the side (1b).

I draw the template on the narrower side, because the wider of the two sides will rest on the bandsaw table for the sawing. The positions of the pegholes are already marked on the template, and can be transferred and punched at the same time.

ALL PHOTOS KATHARINA NEUMÜLLER

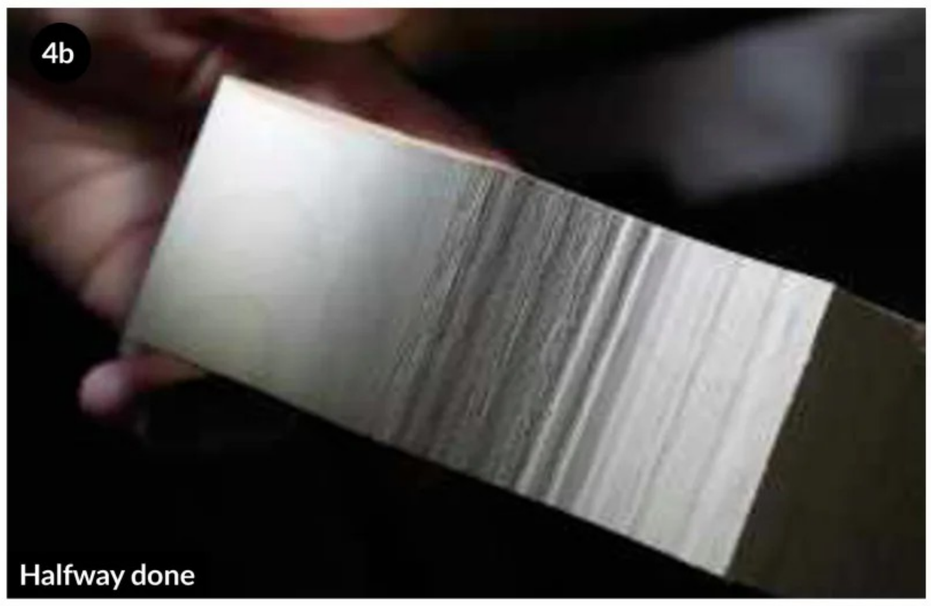

Sawing out the scroll profile

2 I always cut the profile of the neck and scroll on the bandsaw. It automatically gives me a right angle and I don't have to do much reworking. You should make sure that you always apply pressure to the locating surface with your hand, so that the workpiece does not tilt. If there is very little locating surface, or if you are inexperienced, it is advisable to make a wedge and attach it to the neck-block. This will keep the block in place and you can concentrate on sawing.

Drilling the pegholes

3 I then drill the pegholes with a pillar drill. To get a neat hole I drill slowly and use a sharp 6mm drill bit with a pre-cutter and centre point. This means I can use the reamer later with ease, and I don't have to ream as much. It also allows me to take full advantage of right-angled pegholes and I don't run the risk of getting the pegs in at the wrong angle.

4a Using the disc sander


4b Halfway done

4c Using the spindle sander

4 My two sanding machines (disc sander and spindle sander) make my work much easier. Before using them, I always check that the work surface is at a right angle to the sander. Then I can quickly and accurately shape the contours of the scroll. I only press the workpiece lightly against the machine to smooth the surface, having already contoured the outline using the template.

This operation can be done efficiently and very accurately with machines. I can save a lot of time compared to working by hand. ▹

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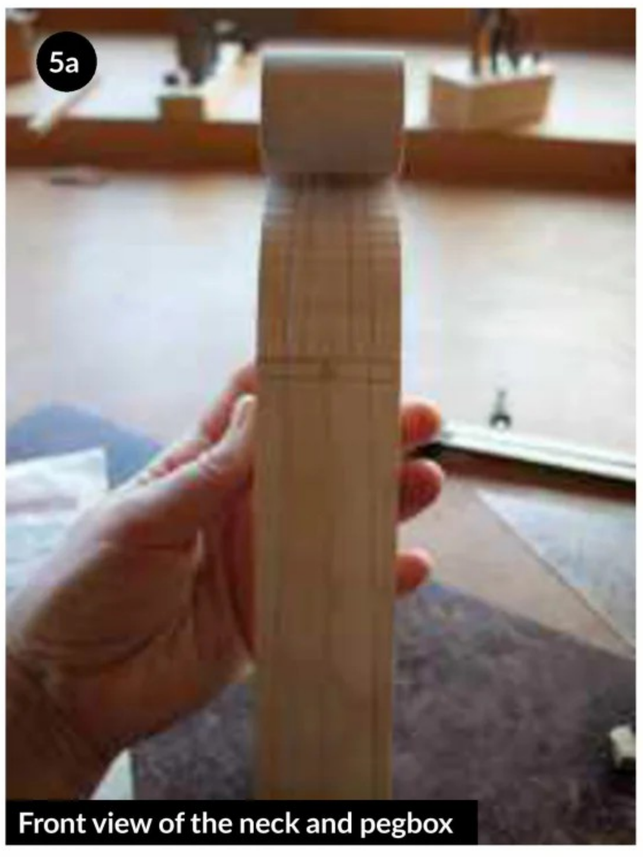


Front view of the neck and pegbox

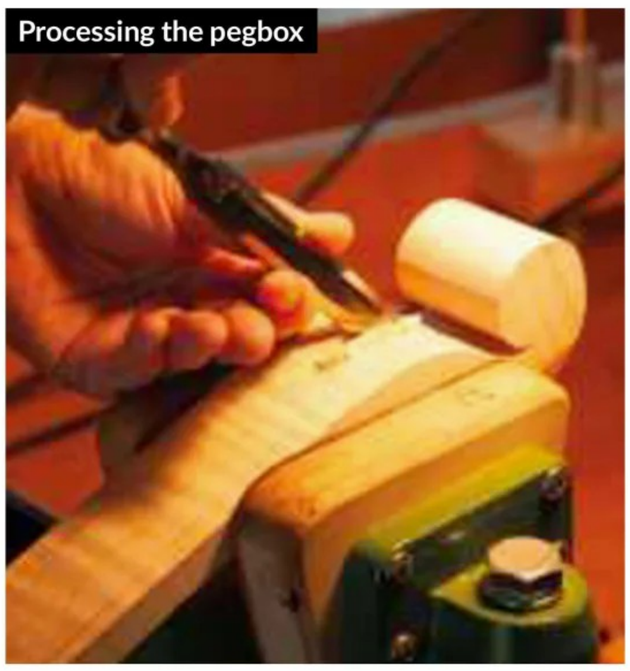
And the view from below

5 Next I sketch the complete front view. To do this, I mark a centre line, which I also centre-punch in several places so that I can reconstruct it at any time, even if the mark disappears during the working process. On the neck, I use my desired fingerboard dimensions with an additional 0.5mm, and I also draw the pegbox with my measurements. This includes the wall thickness. On the neck root, I use the button width plus 2mm as the lower measurement. (The button starts higher up and is narrower owing to the tapered neck root).

Pre-drilling the pegbox

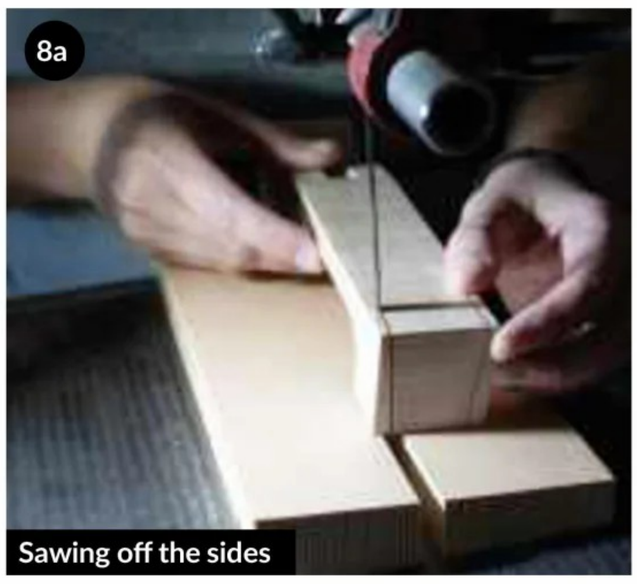
6 After drawing it, I pre-drill the pegbox. I have a support with a side fence for this. I clamp this fence to the support of the pillar drill so that the tip of the drill is exactly on the centre line of the pegbox. I then set the depth fence on the drill to 6mm above my scroll rest. This will leave enough material at the bottom of the pegbox to cut the fillet later. Now I drill one hole next to the other, creating a solid base for finishing the pegbox.

The advantage of doing this before the sides have been cut is that I can work with side fences. This simplifies the operation and makes it much safer.

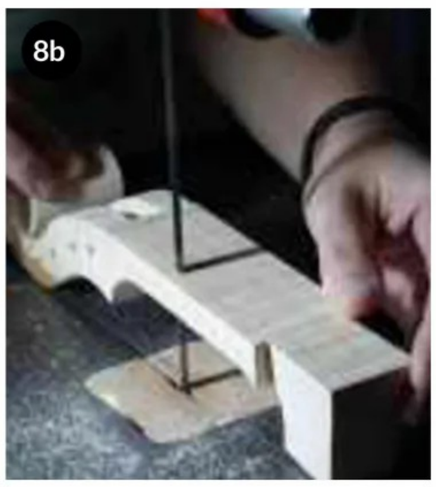

Processing the pegbox

7 Now I chisel out the pegbox. I can easily clamp the neck in a vice and work with precision and strength.

I do this step before carving the scroll because, as mentioned above, I can clamp the workpiece properly and work more accurately. But I also start by working on the actual function of the violin neck, which is to hold the pegs! This prevents me from damaging the intricately carved scroll when I move on to rougher work. Also, there is always the possibility of hidden flaws in the wood. Even then, it is an advantage not to have already invested hours of work.



Sawing off the sides



A template set at the correct angle guides the saw

The sides are completely sawn away

8 I now remove all the material that is no longer needed. To saw the neck root at the correct angle (plus a little allowance), I have a template that is set at the correct angle. There is a cut-out where the saw blade will go. For the other side of the neck root, I turn the board round. Two strong magnets are embedded in the base to prevent it from slipping when the workpiece is pushed through the saw.

I only saw the foot of the neck with the slanted template. All the other cuts are straight again, without using a template.

9 As a final step before I start carving the scroll, I pre-shape the neck slightly. This makes it more comfortable to hold. The back of the pegbox can already be shaped quite accurately. Material will be removed from the neck root later, when the neck is fitted and before I glue it.

Now the scroll and neck are well prepared. Have fun carving the scroll!

TRANSLATION BY ELIZABETH WILLIS

Ready for scroll carving

MY SPACE

A peek into lutherie workshops around the world

LUTHIER

VICTOR HUGO VÉLEZ

LOCATION

Tallinn, Estonia

I began studying lutherie in my native Argentina in 2003, working with violin maker Lionnel Genovart. Six years later I went to Milan to study at the violin making school there, and after spending some time as apprentice in Italy, opened a workshop in Barcelona. At the beginning of 2013 I moved back to Buenos Aires, where I got several orders and at the end of 2014 I went to for a visit to Tallinn. Then I made the craziest decision of my life and decided to open a workshop in the city, even though I spoke no Estonian, no English and no Russian!

When I started, I was relying on the orders I had from customers in South America, Canada and Europe. I was also learning English and practising it every day. Then one of my neighbours, a violinist in the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, recommended me to her colleagues. Now I've been here for the past nine years, as one of the very few luthiers based in the city. I'm quite well known in Tallinn, and every day I have more and more local work.

Tallinn is a very musical city with a lot of instrumentalists, which has undoubtedly helped me establish myself here. There's also a small community of friends from Latin America, and we get together to practise speaking Estonian on Wednesday mornings.

The workshop is around 15 sq m, including the kitchen space behind the camera. It also contains one of the most important pieces of equipment in the workshop at the moment – my humidifier, because the winters in Tallinn are cold (it was recently down to -18C) but extremely dry. The humidity can drop to around 20 per cent, so indoors I try to keep it more like 50 per cent. The other thing about working in Tallinn is that I can only rely on good natural light in the spring and summertime, although it's been good enough to take photos in the past few days.

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD

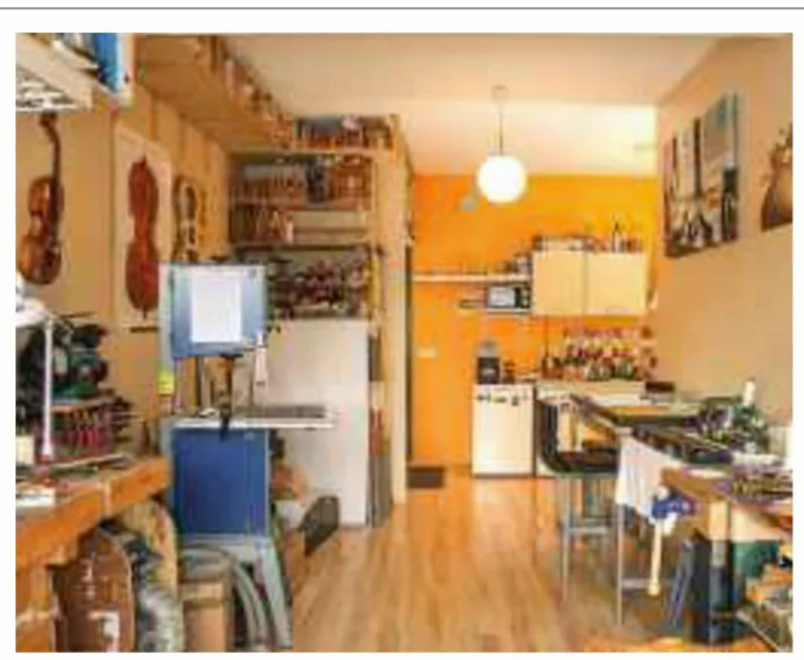
My windows face south, and look out towards Tallinn's old town. The area is a kind of small cultural quarter with lots of artisan workshops. The city's central railway station is also nearby, which makes my workshop very convenient for customers.

The left-hand bench is where I work on making and repairing bows. I create them all by hand apart from the frogs, which I buy in from Germany. And I've found a pernambuco dealer in Romania who supplies me with top-quality bow wood.

ALL PHOTOS VICTOR HUGO VÉLEZ

I get a lot of repair work from both players and instrument dealers, and I've just finished working on this 19th-century German-made violin. It needed a new bridge, soundpost, tailpiece and pegs.

Right Looking towards the kitchen, you can see more of my wood store around the top, as well as my bandsaw, disc sander and UV cabinet on the left. The photos on the right-hand wall were taken by me when I moved in.



Unlike many other luthiers, I prefer to keep instruments in their cases rather than hang them up around the workshop. It keeps them safe and free of the dust that's always generated while I'm working.

This poster shows the back of a Montagnana cello. I've studied it many times, and love the varnish colour, which I've often tried to copy. The cello mould next to it is based on Stradivari's 1712 'Davidov', which I took from *The Strad*'s poster.

Stronger together

Christian Bayon reveals the results of several years' experimentation with improving the stability of a violin's top and back plates without compromising the sound quality

FIGURE 4a Gluing two spruce struts in the upper bouts improved the stability of the top plate

FIGURE 4b Close-up of the spruce pieces in place on the top plate

I have been making violins for 48 years, and was a restorer for 29 of them. I began restoring instruments in 1976 at Etienne Vatelot's shop in Paris before setting up my own atelier in 1984 in Brittany, and then in Lisbon five years later. During these years I gained some experience in deformations to the violin body. The fall of the Berlin Wall brought a huge wave of migration into Western Europe, with violinists and cellists from Russia, Ukraine, Poland and Romania all bringing their instruments to Lisbon, Oporto, Madeira and the Azores. These instruments were not always in the best condition, and bringing them from climates with very dry relative humidity to a more humid environment had a huge impact on their structure.

All these unfortunate situations for the musicians helped me to understand the stress and deformations of their instruments, mainly regarding the top. I began to explore what it was possible for me to do, as a restorer, at least to prevent the problem from becoming worse.

While working on Cremonese instruments at the Vatelot shop I had already experienced the common problem: that the neck projection tends to drop (**figure 1**). This is often because the belly can be so thin around the top-block.

I stopped restoring instruments in 2003, and have only been building new instruments since then. However, many of my customers are permanently on tour, exposing their instruments to significant relative humidity changes, which makes me very concerned about the stability of the neck projection and the string heights. I wanted to ensure that the playability was never affected while touring. For this reason, for the past eight years I have been working on solutions to this problem. I began by experimenting with a new concept for the bass-bar in 2015 (see Trade Secrets, February 2018) and followed it up by trying out different systems of structural reinforcement for the tops and the backs of my instruments.

> THE TECHNIQUE IS NON-INVASIVE, REQUIRES NO REMOVAL OF ORIGINAL WOOD AND – VERY IMPORTANTLY – IS REVERSIBLE

Some of my innovations have been very successful; others not so much (**figure 2**). I began by taking inspiration from the leaves of trees, considering how their internal veins are instrumental in keeping the leaf's shape; its thickness by itself wouldn't be enough to maintain the structure (**figure 3**). I also took inspiration from the rigid 3D structures of aeroplanes and boats.

FIGURE 2a An early attempt to increase the strength and stability of a top plate

FIGURE 2b Something similar for the back plate, adding ridges to the C-bout area

Later I tried more simple and direct ways to alleviate the main stress on the violin body, which is the string tension through the neck and top-block. First I glued two sticks of spruce between the top-block and a very strong area: the 'U' shape on each of the upper corners (**figure 4**). These changes improved the stability of my instruments a great deal.

I then started to think about how this technique could be adapted to the repair of old instruments: it is non-invasive, requires no removal of original wood and – very importantly – is reversible. I reasoned that it should be perfect for instruments of the 16th to 18th centuries, and avoid the terrible 'New York neckset'. This is when you open up the upper part of the top plate (up to the upper corners), pull the neck back to raise the neck projection a few millimetres, and glue the top back again. If the top plate has a little split, you glue the plate at the top of the split – which is not very good for the instrument and makes it harder to open up again. I have seen it done on instruments by Stradivari, Amati and other Cremonese makers. Even more radically, some restorers have fitted some dramatic V-shaped patches near the top- and bottom-blocks, killing the sound without any chance of recovery.

Installing these reinforcements would, of course, require the instrument to be opened. However, if a better solution were to be found in the future, it would be very easy to remove the reinforcements without damaging the instrument.

As another possibility, a very efficient method would be to fit a carbon-fibre rod between the top- and bottom-blocks (**figure 5**). The rod can be installed through the end-button hole, without needing to open the instrument at all. I have experimented with it on old instruments with good results, but I have tried it only once on one of my own violins. Its effect on the sound quality was disastrous. My instrument had plates of normal thickness, and the carbon-fibre tube completely blocked the torsion mode of the body. My theory is that this method will work only if the instrument plates are much thinner – but I haven't yet dared to build a very thin instrument myself to check the result. ●

FIGURE 3 The internal structure of leaves was an inspiration

FIGURE 1 Top crack caused by deformation and the violin's dramatic neck projection

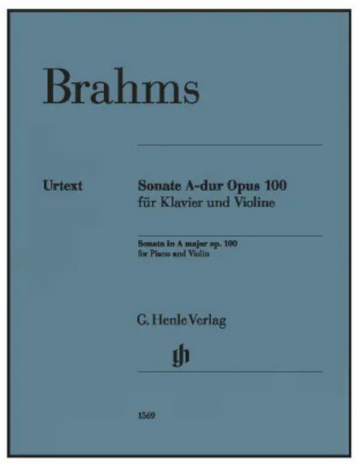
FIGURE 5 Fitting a carbon-fibre rod could have the same effect

ALL PHOTOS CHRISTIAN BAYON

MASTERCLASS

BRAHMS VIOLIN SONATA NO.2, FIRST MOVEMENT

Taking inspiration from the composer's Lieder, violinist **Daniel Kurganov** highlights the importance of emulating vocal lines in the second of Brahms's violin sonatas



From Brahms Violin Sonata in A major op.100. Urtext Edition, paperbound with marked and unmarked string parts. Ed. Bernd Wiechert. Pf fingering Martin Helmchen. Vn fingering and bowing Frank Peter Zimmermann. Order no. HN 1569 · ISMN 979-0-2018-1569-5. €13.00. Printed with permission of G.Henle Verlag, München © 2022

Brahms composed the Violin Sonata no.2 op.100 in 1886 while immersed in a pastoral state of mind on a summer retreat in Thun, Switzerland. You can see that from the immediate lyrical warmth of the opening. It was this violin sonata that captured my heart and imagination first, and I ended up recording it on my debut album in 2018. It's so obviously vocal, with references to his Lied op.105 no.1 'Wie Melodien zieht es mir' ('It moves like a melody') with additional allusions to op.97 no.6 'Komm bald' ('Come soon'), and op.105 no.4 'Auf dem Kirchhofe' ('In the churchyard'). I find Elisabeth Schwarzkopf's recording of 'Wie Melodien' to be a true inspiration.

Over many years I immersed myself in Brahms recordings by violinists I admire, notably Toscha Seidel and Henryk Szeryng. It certainly shaped the way I play and was an important moment in the development of my taste. I also learnt a lot from emulating the freedom with which they played.

For this new album of all three sonatas, pianist Constantine Finehouse and I had access to a 1706 Guarneri 'filius Andreae' violin and custom-made raw gut strings in collaboration with Aquila Corde, as well as an 1868 Streicher piano – exactly the same one that Brahms loved and used. The Streicher really allows drastic changes in colour when playing in different registers, very much like a singer. It greatly influenced the outcome of these new recordings and forever changed the way I approach this music and collaboration with a pianist in general. In this article I will give some advice on how a violinist might approach the work. Naturally there are many things to say from a pianistic and ensemble-focused point of view, but I hope this provides a good starting point for further exploration.

SAULIUS KE PHOTOGRAPHY

THE SOLOIST

NAME
DANIEL KURGANOV

NATIONALITY
AMERICAN

STUDIED WITH
RUDOLF KOELMAN

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'Brahms's crafting of the interplay between the violin and piano is striking and beautiful – even seemingly unattainable'

Daniel Kurganov and Constantine Finehouse's new album *The Brahms Age* (Hänssler Classic HC22081) features all three Brahms violin sonatas performed on historical instruments. Watch the full performances and documentary at bit.ly/3srJrV4

Tempo and long lines

Allegro amabile is not a common direction you see in musical markings, *amabile* meaning tender and gracious. This opening theme arguably comes from *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* by Wagner, so that naturally lends a very vocal quality to this introduction.

While we often preach the virtues of 'longer lines', it's crucial to notice the subtlety of spoken gestures interwoven within them. The piano introduces the piece with a bel canto-style line, to which the violin responds with a short inviting gesture – a tease, almost. Rather than as a seamlessly blended tapestry, I see this as a call and response. This spoken quality paves the way for the more elaborate and lyrical lines that develop later in the movement. However, one must take care not to spoil this introduction with excessive simplicity – the music is overqualified for that!

One thought experiment I like to run with music in general is: can you play this twice as fast and see what the music wants to tell you? It's a curious thing to do, but it does expose a lot about the architecture of a piece. When you have these long stretches of music that go up and down in a million different possible ways, you can get lost in a sea of options. I find that by just singing it twice as fast to yourself, you start to see where the impulses are, and where there are peaks and valleys. So when you retain ten per cent of that in the final performance, you can really craft an intention into the music. It's the best tool to discover longer lines.

Mood

Brahms builds up these themes to bar 31, which is a decidedly vertical moment in the music. It's very optimistic music to me, and very warm. Even if it's forte, it's not like the Violin Sonata no.3 op.108. It's not so heroic.

Rather than a sustained powerful sound in the forte, I started to favour a sound that was more percussive, in the sense that there's a decay. This approach highlights the syncopation better in bars 33–34. This verticality is also inspired by the particular instrument – when we played it on the Streicher piano, the sound was markedly smaller when compared to a modern piano. That allows me to be more free and less anxious about being covered by the piano. The instrument moved me, as did the gut strings, which don't respond in the same way as modern strings. Sometimes playing a nine-foot Steinway can feel like a heavy metal concert if the pianist isn't careful. There are no such issues with the 1868 Streicher.

The piano has the second theme in bar 50 and the violin takes a shot at it in bar 66. There's a way to play this very slow again, very legato, embodying expression in every note. Think of the connection between one note and the next, making sure to vibrate the little notes. That's one hallmark of the great string players we know and love.

From bar 103 we have canonic material. Brahms is trying to find a bridge to that theme in bar 117. One can hear a nod to Beethoven's death theme as it dies down into an accompanimental line, followed by the same theme in a highly vocal singing version. Then the first theme returns. If we were to find a climactic point, I would say it is bar 215. We have the second iteration of the second theme and something has to happen there. The abrupt change of character in bar 219 following the fortepiano must be prepared. Consider taking a generous amount of time on those triplets ( ) and land confidently on 219, letting the sound ring a little before moving through the music. This is, after all, the final time we hear this triumphant gesture. The music dissipates into a magical memory of the past by bar 227, signalling a coda. The end of the movement is a very clean V-I. As with much of Brahms, try not to over-intellectualise the situation. You can play it with simplicity and drive.

Interplay with the piano

Brahms's crafting of the interplay between the violin and piano is striking and beautiful – even seemingly unattainable. For example, in bar 50 the piano takes over and somehow you have to find a way to pass on your A sharp to the piano. It almost has to be the same instrument, like a mother passing something on to her child. If you rehearse this seriously, you'll discover many 'nos' and hopefully some 'yeses'. You'll know immediately when you've achieved it.

There are a few technical elements to aid the violinist in finding lower dynamics and matching textures. I like experimenting with the fingerboard, seeing where the limit is and at what point it will fail and sound too wispy.

What's very important is the feeling of a breath. The sound never completely stops. We have a diminuendo in the violin part, but it's not a gradual exhalation. I think it's an inhalation suggesting quiet tension. I like to hold it over for a little longer until the piano comes in, so there's this rubbing up between the A sharp and the B – just enough to glue the seam. I've heard so many recordings where it's just like the violinist and pianist are in their own worlds!

Authenticity and following the Urtext

Having editions such as Henle, which present Brahms's original compositions untouched by later edits, is a treasure. It's our window into his time and vision. But do not be afraid to change the markings of a score if you feel compelled to do so. It will either work or not. Always consider: if that hairpin weren't there, would you have had the idea to do it? If the answer is no, then you must be careful that you are not simply following instructions. A sensitive audience will hear that. You can consider further: what if there were no markings at all? Just notes and rhythm. Where would your musical instincts lead you? While I believe in assigning weight to a composer's vision, in the end you must let your ideas battle it out with the ideas of others as well as the composer's markings. This *tabula rasa* (blank slate) approach is crucial in crafting your unique yet faithful rendition. You must be in collaboration with the composer. I believe this is how it was intended to be. This is the path of true authenticity. ▹

INTERVIEW BY DAVINA SHUM

Top fingering: Simpler, more 'historical'
Bottom fingering: More Romantic

Sonate

Violine

Komponiert 1886 · Erschienen 1887

Opus 100

Allegro amabile

vocal shift!

phrase to here

cresc.

f

mp

take time

blend to open string

sing the little notes!

dim.

p

p dol.

f

espress.

take time!

cresc.

f

79
f
84
dim.
p
G. P.
p
91
dim.
colour change
96
p
dim.
104
p
f
p
f
111
f e sempre più
f marc.
extreme clarity
118
differentiate crotchets, quavers,
triplets and semiquavers
f whole bows
123
sustain through the string-crossings
f marc.
128
dim.
keep the sound rich and full
non-vib. solemn church bells
134
dim.
save
p
These figures can be somewhat improvisatory,
Experiment with bringing certain notes out.
140

146
p
cantabile.....sostenuto

150
dol.
più p

155
dim.

162
p
surprise!
more

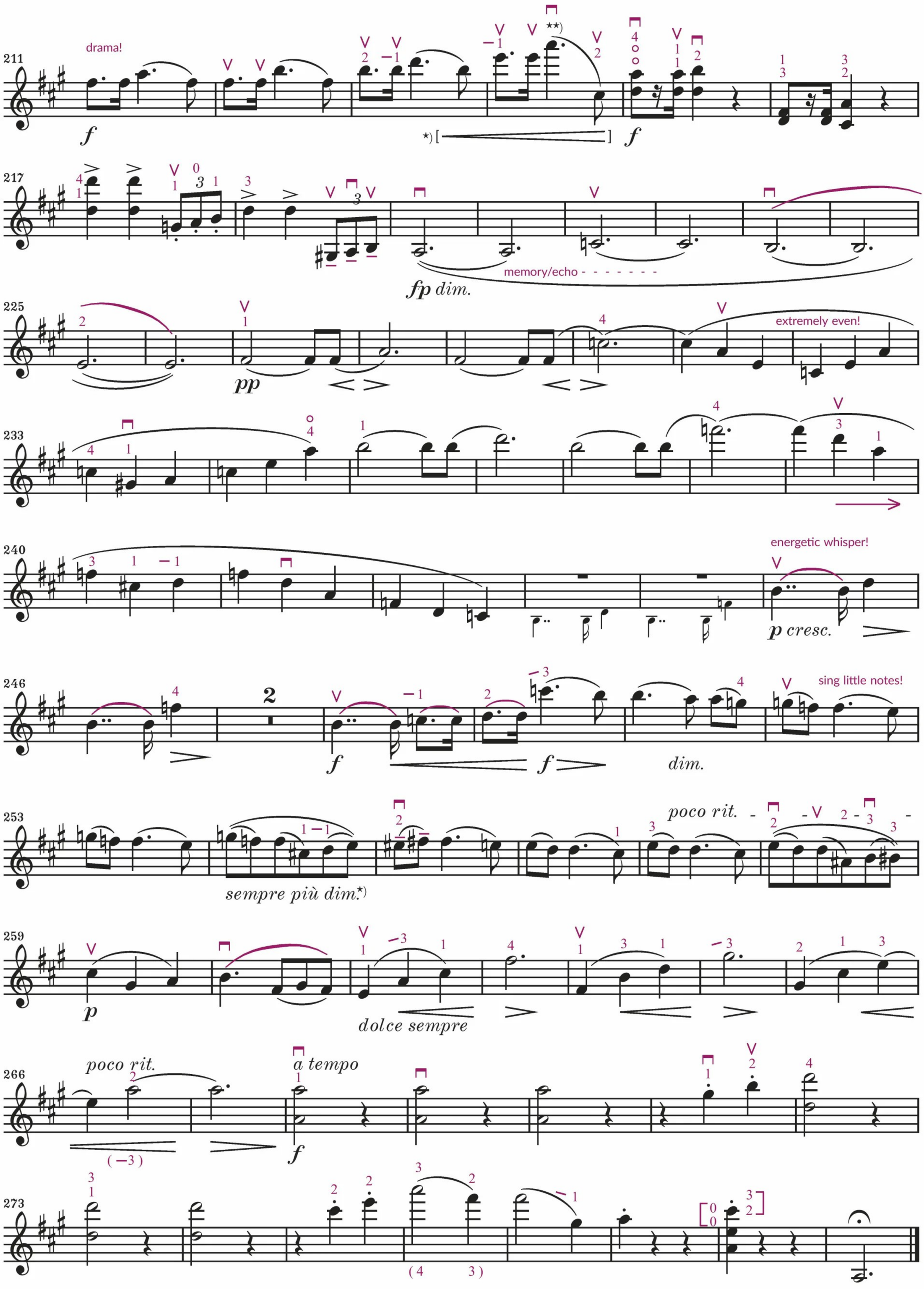
170
f

178
f
whole bows
extend every note!
dim.

183
p
p dol.

189

195
p
espress.

205
consider sometimes phrasing away
from the dotted crotchets
cresc.

211
drama!
f
*) [ ]
f
217
memory/echo - - - - - - -
fp dim.
225
pp
extremely even!
233
240
energetic whisper!
p cresc.
246
f
f
dim.
sing little notes!
253
sempre più dim.*)
poco rit.
259
p
dolce sempre
266
poco rit.
a tempo
(−3)
f
273
(4 3)

Yin and yang

Using balance to create a free viola sound

SIMON ROWLAND-JONES

Professor of viola and chamber music, Royal College of Music; chamber music at Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London, UK

BORN
Colchester, UK

STUDIED WITH
Patrick Ireland, Cecil Aronowitz, Bruno Giuranna

TEACHES
from 18 years old

As a viola player I have spent a great deal of my life thinking about how to create a sound on my instrument that I like, and that best enables me to express myself freely. In turn I have encouraged my students to embark on the process of finding their own sound, which in itself can inspire them to develop their playing more generally.

In my experience I have found that students want to address the issue of sound early on, as so often they feel that there is a blockage, usually resulting from some kind of physical tension. Histories of back or shoulder problems are common, but this is not surprising considering violas are mostly quite big and heavy, and physically challenging to play. To make a better, bigger sound the temptation is to 'try harder' by pushing down with the right arm, rather than drawing the sound out of the string. To do this effectively, for a richer and deeper sound, there must be a good balance between the arms – with an upward feeling of support from the left arm to counteract the downward (falling) feeling from the bowing arm. This means that the left arm/hand becomes semi-responsible for supporting the instrument, sharing support with the collarbone, and gaining an enhanced role in the production of sound; not just a means of producing pitches and vibrato.

Too much reliance on the large bracket-style shoulder rest – or 'scaffolding' as I sometimes call it – often results in a tighter and more 'pressed' sound, especially if the instrument ends up in a fixed position supported entirely by a clamped chin and shoulder. The bracket-style shoulder rest fills the gap between the chin and the shoulder some distance away from the neck. While this undoubtedly provides stability for the viola and a sense of security for the player when shifting, it can be counter-productive to making the optimum sound.

On the whole, for shoulder support I favour a small pad of some sort placed close to the neck. This inevitably shifts some of the responsibility for supporting the instrument to the left hand, creating a good overall balance and connection between the two hands, and therefore a more vibrant sound. However, as a teacher, I respect the preferred set-up of each student, while at the same time I try to nurture the sensation of producing sound with at least partial support from the left arm/hand.

GET THE FEELING

- Start with no shoulder rest on the instrument, Baroque-style
- Relaxing both shoulders, lift the viola and rest it on your collarbone. Support the viola safely, resting it comfortably in the palm of your hand where the viola neck joins the body of the instrument, aiming to share the weight of the viola equally between your collarbone and your left arm/hand.
- Then, leaving the viola resting on the collarbone and without putting the chin on the chin rest, free yourself from the association of clamping with the chin and shoulder by moving the viola around.

KEVIN LAITAK

Lift the instrument up and down and move it from side to side. Then make circles with the scroll.

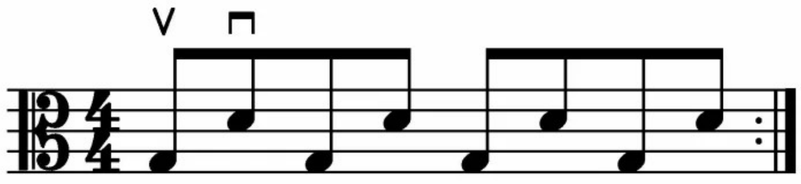
- Slip a foam pad (or folded duster or two) under your instrument, as close to your neck as feels comfortable for you. (Once you have found the right spot you may like to use an elastic band to secure it to your instrument.)
- Starting in the middle of the bow, play some open strings, noticing how increasing upward support from the left arm/hand encourages you to allow more right-arm weight to drop into the string, and at the same time leaves both shoulders totally relaxed
- Listen to your sound as you play and feel the connection between the two hands – almost as though you were rubbing them together. Think of this in terms of a balancing of the hands. The more sensitive you are to this, the richer the sound will be. You will begin to hear harmonics ringing!
- Think of the place where the bow touches the string as a 'pinpoint of sound', like a light floating in space that can change in intensity and colour
- Even when you go back to using your shoulder rest, revisit this exercise regularly, leaving a little time each day to play some open strings with no added shoulder support. The benefits to your sound will filter through over time.

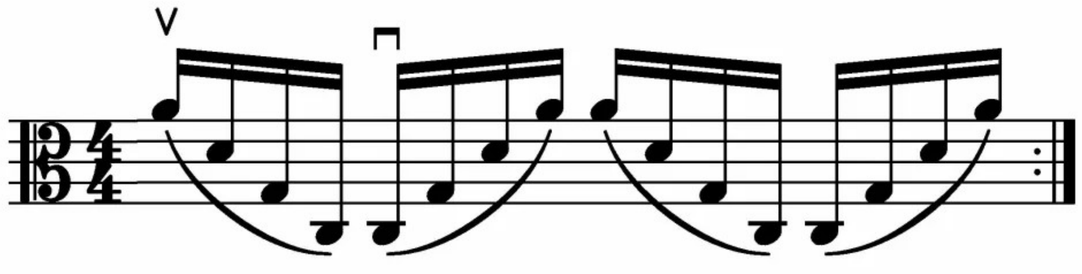
EXERCISES

Here are two of my warm-up exercises (**exercise 1** and **2**), which are best practised without any added shoulder support.

Repeat each exercise multiple times, depending on how much time you have. In the first, use about a third of the bow starting in the middle, then move incrementally nearer to the heel. Lift the viola very slightly (without lifting the shoulder) to meet the change from up to down bow. Vary the dynamics as you like.

Exercise 2 serves as a good basis for preparing to play chords and arpeggiated figurations, particularly in Bach. Allow extra arm weight to drop into the open-string bass notes; the right elbow needs to be hanging low enough to provide relaxed weight. Meanwhile use your newly experienced sense of balance between the arms to allow them to support one another.

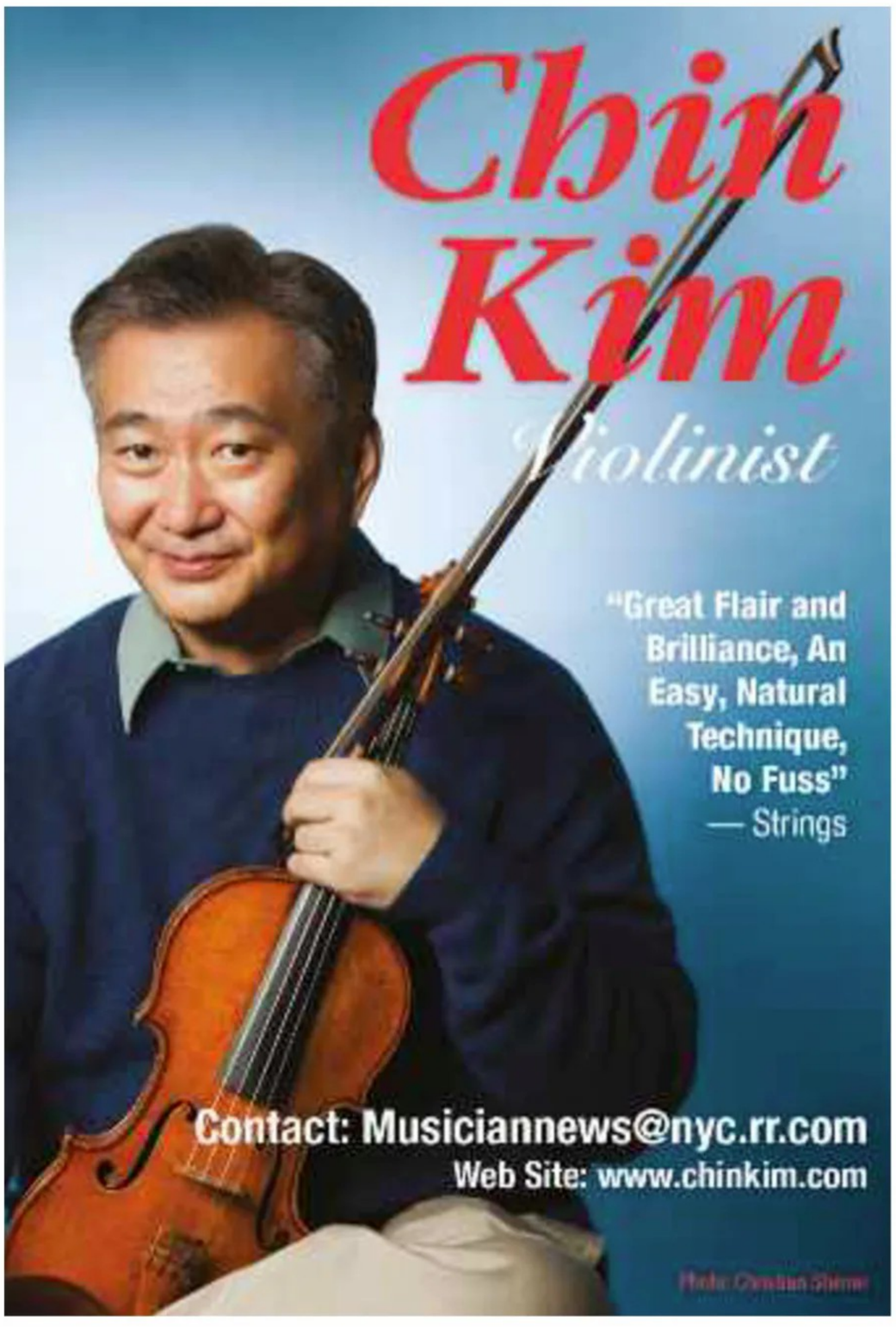
EXERCISE 1 The exercise starts in the middle of the bow and incrementally moves nearer to the heel

EXERCISE 2 This is especially useful for chords and arpeggiated figurations in Bach



REPERTOIRE

Playing the Bach Cello Suites, mostly manageable in first position, is a useful and enjoyable way to explore freedom of sound without added shoulder support. When you use your shoulder rest again you may find that this experience will have informed the way you play.

The opening of the Walton Viola Concerto (**example 1**, page 83) is one of the best examples of cantabile espressivo writing in the viola repertoire, and here it is essential to produce a free, live and variable sound. The passage demands the ability to vary the intensity of expression by combining the appropriate bow speed with right-arm weight and speed/width of vibrato. Allow for the possibility of increasing the bow speed on the long notes by starting with a slow-enough bow. Developing vibrato from intensely centred to freely open on the long D in the second ▹



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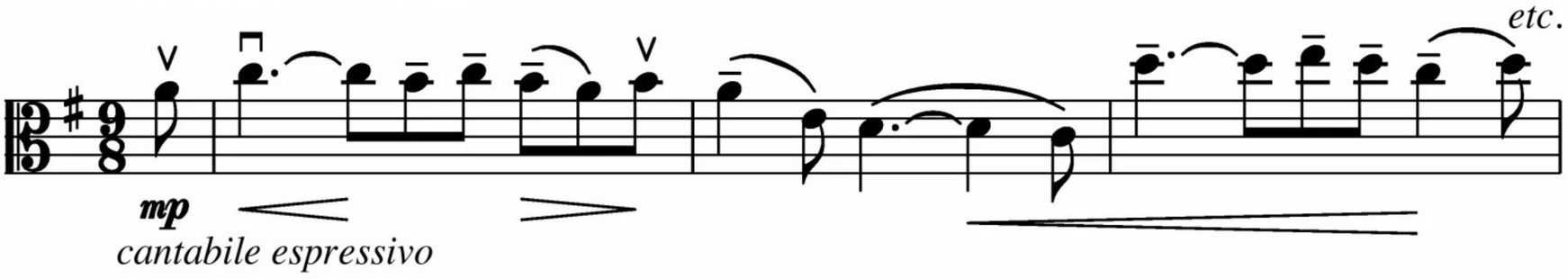
bar seems a good way to lift the phrase up to the loftier third bar. Make sure that the bow speed of the separate quavers (♪) is at least as fast as the end of the preceding long notes (use proportionally more bow on the shorter quavers).

EXAMPLE 1 The viola's first entrance in Walton's Viola Concerto's first movement. The bowing combines the original 1930 Oxford University Press edition's and my own

IN YOUR PRACTICE

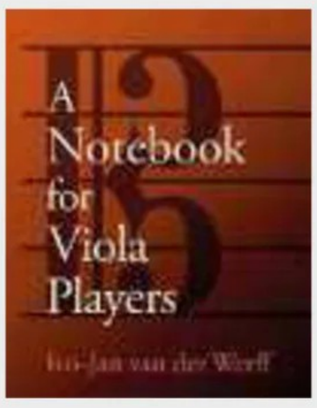
- Begin each practice session with a few minutes of the **Get The Feeling** section exercise (page 80)
- Include some string-crossings as shown in the **Exercises** section (page 81)
- After you have done these, free yourself up again by moving the viola around, up and down, side to side, and making circles with your scroll
- It is a good idea to incorporate some basic bow-distribution exercises (including varying the bow speed), keeping that feeling of balance and friction between the two hands
- Reinstate your preferred shoulder rest for the remainder of the practice, but regularly refer back in your mind to that just-experienced sensation of connection between the hands

TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- When taking on a new student, ask them if they are happy with their sound, and if not, how they would like to improve it
- To get a better idea of their understanding of sound production to date, ask how they would go about teaching it
- The first time you ask a student to play without a shoulder rest, there is a tendency for the shoulder to lift along with the left arm. Ensure that both shoulders are relaxed as the left arm lifts.
- Ask your students to examine their shoulder support:
    - What are they using it for?
    - Do they really need it?
    - Is the right type?
    - Is it in the right place?
- Understanding how to produce good sound is an ongoing process. Encourage students to get a taste for it early on, as any improvement is exciting and a great motivator.
- We are all built differently, but whatever a student's preference, incorporating some support from the left hand will feed through into their sound in a positive way. Note: It seems to make more sense for students with long necks to use a higher chin rest rather than increase their shoulder support.
- If students have the time, and no impending repertoire exam, it may be beneficial to focus on these basic ideas for a few weeks; the longer-term benefits will be worth it.

INTERVIEW BY NAOMI YANDELL

FURTHER MATERIALS



Ivo-Jan van der Werff and I both studied with Bruno Giuranna; Ivo's resourceful book, ***A Notebook for Viola Players***, includes some invaluable exercises that Bruno devised for his students.

The **Huber Non-Slip Violin Shoulder Pad Kit** (the same for both violin and viola) is one excellent solution for shoulder support, as it offers a simple and flexible way to assemble a shoulder pad to suit each individual.

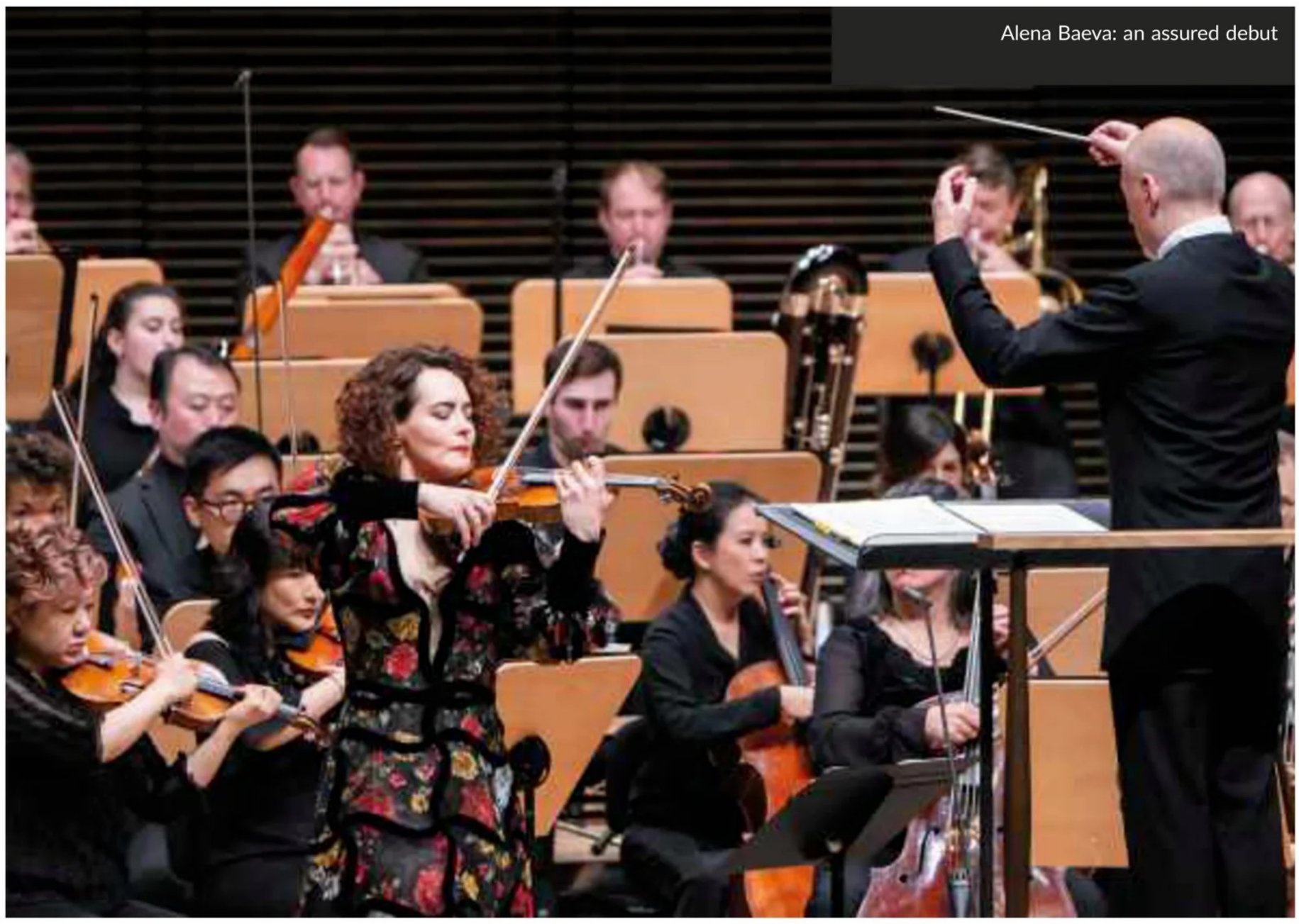
NEXT MONTH
Violinist Jack Liebeck on lower-half bowing

Reviews

Your monthly critical round-up of performances, recordings and publications

CONCERTS

New York



Alena Baeva: an assured debut

ALENA BAEVA (VIOLIN) NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC/PAAVO JÄRVI
DAVID GEFFEN HALL 17 NOVEMBER 2023

The New York Philharmonic's concert began in dramatic style with Estonian composer Veljo Tormis's Overture no.2, with furious playing in the strings and energised percussion before the frenzy dissolved into a touching cello solo played by Patrick Jee.

Britten's Violin Concerto followed, marking the New York Philharmonic debut of Alena Baeva, a violinist who fled Kyrgyzstan as a child and grew up in Kazakhstan. Immediately her sweetness of tone captured the ear and she proved herself to be an artist possessing both elegance and power. She addressed Britten's virtuosic runs, double-stops, up-bow spiccato and all manner of technical challenges with precision and flair. The second-movement Vivace began with confidence and, even in its most technically daunting moments, Baeva was completely in control of sound production, tone colour and phrasing, skilfully navigating Britten's challenges with playing full of purpose and character. The way she pulled sound out of the violin was utterly captivating – whether in high position on the G string or the E string – and throughout the work, her poise and precision carried through. I was happy to see a standing ovation from many, and as an encore she played the first movement of Ysaÿe's Solo Violin Sonata no.5, again displaying power and elegance in tandem.

Prokofiev's Symphony no.6 followed the interval, with poignant viola solos played by Rebecca Young and an interpretation that captured the pain of the cultural moment in which the symphony was written – mirroring the pain in our world now.

LEAH HOLLINGSWORTH

CHRIS LEE

THIS MONTH'S RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS
Our pick of the new releases

Passionate intensity from the **Minetti Quartet**
PAGE 88

Adventurous programming from **Trio Isimsiz**
PAGE 90

A striking debut from **Anastasia Kobekina**
PAGE 95

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SYBARITE 5

THE CRYPT AT THE CHURCH OF THE INTERCESSION
30 NOVEMBER 2023

Rhythmic energy was a driving force throughout Sybarite 5's programme, presented by Death of Classical in the Crypt at the Church of the Intercession. I was immediately taken by the electricity of the interplay between second violin and viola in Chris Thile's *Movement and Location*, the opening work. *Yann's Flight* by Shawn Conley painted a sound picture of aerial movement, highlighted by unisons played with impressive clarity and precise intonation. Perhaps the ricochet of the violins and the arpeggiation of the viola detracted a bit from the melodic line in Radiohead's *Weird Fishes*, but Laura Kaminsky's *Overflow* (receiving its world premiere) suggested that beauty of sound – reflecting the world's physical beauty – can exist within a harsh cultural moment, as expressed in aggressive chords and semiquavers.

Three of Komitas's Armenian folksongs (arranged by Sybarite 5) followed, with the first especially soulful. Latin bassist and composer Pedro Giraudo's *Con un nudo en la garganta* was also quite beautiful, marrying well rhythmic energy and melodic intent. Next came an arrangement of Mahler's Adagietto from his Symphony no.5 and the grit in the ensemble sound made for a raw and very human approach to this profoundly moving work.

Serbian composer Aleksandra Vrebalov's *My Desert, My Rose* concluded the programme and Sybarite 5's rhythmic drive and passionate melodic lines brought this robust work to an intense climax and the unforgettable evening to a close. Presenter Andrew Ousley did it again: bringing extraordinary artists to an innovative setting and a highly appreciative audience.

LEAH HOLLINGSWORTH

STEVEN PISANO

Enterprising programming from Sybarite 5

Philadelphia

SHEKU KANNEH-MASON (CELLO)

PERELMAN THEATER 7 NOVEMBER 2023

Given the extraordinary cellists who have played Bach's Cello Suite no.2 over the past few centuries since its rediscovery, something unusual is happening when it opens an evening – and the audience responds with a 30-second ovation. That happened at Sheku Kanneh-Mason's concert, his first appearance at the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society in four years.

There are, of course, numerous ways of engaging with the suite. Kanneh-Mason proceeded to make it his own, creating an ever-probing narrative, with acutely judged dynamic contrasts ranging from the verge of inaudibility all the way to roaring lunges: I've never thought of this suite as a thrilling adventure until now. Britten's First Cello Suite closed the opening half, with similar thoughtfulness and profundity, as Kanneh-Mason often seemed lost in delight at the composer's constantly evolving landscape.

As the soft-spoken cellist introduced three works commissioned for him, a microphone might have been welcome. But when his 1700 Matteo Gofriller instrument sprang to life, its tone did the talking, blooming luxuriantly in the hall. All made strong impressions, starting with *Prayer for the Senses* (2022) by Welsh pianist/composer Gwilym Simcock, who nods to Bach with appealing contrapuntalism. Leo Brouwer's Cello Sonata no.2 (2020), has roots in the Cuban composer's guitar expertise, and this was followed by Five Preludes (2022) by Edmund Finnis, with the striking harmonics in no.4 being particularly memorable. The evening closed with Gaspar Cassadó's Suite for Solo Cello (1926), a non-stop flood of virtuosity that again brought the capacity audience to its feet.

As an arrestingly non-traditional encore, the cellist put down his bow for a gentle, all-pizzicato version of 'She Used to Call Me Dada' by reggae legend Bob Marley.

BRUCE HODGES

MARIA IOUDENITCH, CLAIRE BOURG (VIOLINS) HAYANG PARK, BETH GUTERMAN CHU (VIOLAS) CHRISTOPH RICHTER (CELLO)

AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY 14 NOVEMBER 2023

Launched in the 1950s, Music from Marlboro has become one of the world's pre-eminent festivals, in which both players and audiences go to be immersed in the joys of chamber music. In his opening remarks for this concert, Philadelphia Chamber Music Society artistic director Miles Cohen commented both on the festival's history and the time spent rehearsing for this concert (which clearly paid off).

Marlboro musicians sharing the joy of chamber music

The evening began with Haydn's Quartet in G major op.77 no.1, and it would be hard to imagine a foursome – Maria Ioudenitch, Claire Bourg, Hayang Park and Christoph Richter – having more fun. In their hands, the sprightly opening movement, with bow strokes creating happy, cricket-like chirping, was matched by the gleeful precision in the final two movements, with the Adagio offering a serene respite.

In his notes for *Viola, Viola* (1997) George Benjamin wrote that he wanted 'to conjure an almost orchestral depth and variety of sound'. Beth Guterman Chu joined Park to realise his intentions, as if forging a Mahler symphony in a mere nine minutes. For fun, I was imagining a similar work called *Violin, Violin* or *Cello, Cello*, but neither could emulate the throaty resonance that the composer – and this duo – mined so successfully.

After the interval came a gorgeously textured excerpt from Walker's *Lyric for Strings*, arranged for quartet. Given all that came before, anticipation was high for the final piece: Mendelssohn's Quartet op.44 no.3. I'm happy to report that its exuberance did not disappoint.

BRUCE HODGES

BROOKLYN RIDER

AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY 21 NOVEMBER 2023

In his lively notes for this evening with Brooklyn Rider, titled 'Sandbox of Invention', violist Nicholas Cords described Haydn's C major Quartet op.20 no.2, nicknamed 'Sun', as a 'veritable playground of flattened hierarchy, mirroring the contemporaneous philosophical and political shifts under way during the Age of Enlightenment'. Given the reading with his colleagues – Johnny Gandelsman and Colin Jacobsen (violins) and Michael Nicolas (cello) – the operative word was 'playground', with all four players relishing moments of sunny delight.

Gandelsman introduced three works from the group's latest *Brooklyn Rider Almanac* and encouraged the audience to imagine a film synced to Clarice Assad's *Cinematheque*, which turned out to be packed with unbridled energy, and worthy of Martin Scorsese or David Lynch. Then came Tyshawn Sorey's *(untitled)*, which bore a cinematic presence as well – less nervous and more contemplative, with spare, glassy, slowly shifting textures. The final part of the trio, *American Studies* by Gabriel Kahane, had a wiry, hymn-like aura sparked with folk fiddling. Aside from the instrumental expertise, what was evident during this concert was a love not only for Americana, but also for exploring the outer realms of contemporary composition.

The second half began with Gubaidulina's *Reflections on the Theme B-A-C-H* (2002), with its shimmering array of tremolos, glissandos and pitches at the upper end of the spectrum. And then with surprising insight, the foursome continued *attacca* into Schumann's Quartet in A minor op.41 no.1, which somehow made the perfect ending to a tautly absorbing evening.

BRUCE HODGES

London

CHLOË HANSLIP (VIOLIN) DANNY DRIVER (PIANO)

WIGMORE HALL 29 OCTOBER 2023

In this Wigmore Hall Sunday Morning Concert, Chloë Hanslip and Danny Driver delivered a pre-lunch concert equivalent of a roast with all the trimmings. To start with, the partnership is strong: the two seamlessly trading phrases in the first movement of Beethoven's Violin Sonata op.12 no.1 and matching each other in brilliance and, in the movement's development, in richer tonal shading. The precision of Hanslip's left hand in fast passages was striking and she infused accompanying figures with as much care as 'solo' material. If there was just a shade of relaxed lyricism missing, that wasn't the case in Amy Beach's *Romance*, Hanslip sinking gratifyingly into its bygone-era salonesque idiom and offering generous bottom-string richness.

Strauss's sonata was the showstopper, though. Hanslip's expression was effusive in the first

PETE CHECCHIA

Hearty fare from Chloë Hanslip and Danny Driver

movement, which both players kept charged with driving momentum. Blazing climaxes took on a thrilling, almost Expressionistic edge. After a reflective, lyrical second movement, the finale brought more fireworks; Danny Driver's contribution – offering dynamic, precise and intelligent playing of the fiendish, orchestrally conceived piano part – was remarkable. It was a performance to set the blood racing: just the thing to work up an appetite.

EDWARD BHESANIA

JAMES EHNES (VIOLIN) PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA/PAAVO JÄRVI

ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL 26 NOVEMBER 2023

James Ehnes appeared at this afternoon concert as a replacement for pianist Daniil Trifonov, and the less-than-capacity audience heard instead a remarkable performance of Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto. With Ehnes, remarkable always seems to come as standard, but he still gave a masterclass in what can be done with a violin. After the brisk opening he produced some gossamer playing, fluent and free, and built steadily through melodies and technical fireworks alike. The second subject was sumptuous, growing organically from quiet simplicity to soaring rapture and onward to the great orchestral tutti. The staccato semiquaver variant of the opening theme, capricious and charming, was immaculate in all its varieties of bowing, and the cadenza was finely shaped, both brilliant and musically captivating.

The second-movement Canzonetta was eloquent, expressive and moving, aided by some beautiful contributions from clarinet and flute. As marked, Ehnes played with a mute throughout (which is not to be taken for granted – why do some fiddle players think they know better than the composer?). The finale combined dynamism, drama and precision. Afterwards Ehnes played Ysaÿe's Third Solo Sonata in the best virtuoso encore style, compelling and viscerally exciting.

The Philharmonia with Paavo Järvi, who had been fine partners to Ehnes, went on to give an impressive account of Prokofiev's Sixth Symphony in E flat minor (surely a key only a pianist could love).

TIM HOMFRAY

GIL SHAHAM (VIOLIN) PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA/SANTTU-MATIAS ROUVALI

ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL 3 DECEMBER 2023

This Philharmonia concert had a good Christmas Sunday afternoon family programme, with Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* at the end and Dvořák to begin. The orchestra gave dashing accounts of the first three of Dvořák's *Slavonic Dances* op.46, before Gil Shaham came on to perform the A minor Violin Concerto. This is essentially an upbeat piece, but should anyone have been in any doubt, Shaham had a beaming smile on his face, which remained there pretty much throughout the concerto. He got the bit between his teeth straight away, with playing of boundless vitality, robust and brilliant, seemingly relishing his own virtuosity. After the long fluent opening statement of the second movement, he was firm-toned in the central section, in the company of some fine horn playing, and produced exquisite pianissimos and some shapely passagework after the trumpet fanfares.

Shaham revelled in the dance rhythms of the finale, leaning into the rhythmic heart of every phrase and all but singing along with the orchestra when he wasn't playing. It was all done with an ease and panache which belied its technical demands. He ended with a terrific virtuoso flourish and another broad grin. The orchestra under Santtu-Matias Rouvali was an excellent, sensitive partner.

TIM HOMFRAY

Radiant Dvořák from Gil Shaham

HANSLIP PHOTO WIGMORE HALL TRUST 2023. SHAHAM PHOTO CHRIS LEE

A spirit of collaboration from the Weiss Kaplan Stumpf Trio

BEETHOVEN Complete Piano Trios: op.1 nos.1–3, op.70 nos.1 'Ghost' and 2, op.97 'Archduke'; Variations op.44, op.121a

Weiss Kaplan Stumpf Trio

BRIDGE BRIDGE9505AC (3 CDS)

A fine Beethoven cycle enters a much-recorded arena

The Weiss Kaplan Stumpf Trio is not a regular recording ensemble: it has appeared on albums dedicated to the music of Lerdahl and Lansky, and some years ago released a disc of trios by Brahms and Smetana. The three musicians have, however, been performing together for over 20 years, specialising in Beethoven.

Now the group offers a recording coupling the six 'standard' piano trios and a pair of variation sets. The designation 'complete' isn't quite true: missing are the early WoO38, a couple of single-movement Allegrettos and op.11, in which the violin often substitutes for the specified clarinet – all works that are included on complete sets by the likes of the Florestan and Wanderer trios. This new set, however, mixes up the trios to form satisfying programmes.

It's an attractive prospect, and in the main the performances satisfy on their own terms. Violinist Mark Kaplan plays a Stradivari from 1685, cellist Peter Stumpf a 1642 Amati, with pianist Yael Weiss on a standard concert Steinway. The microphones come in fairly close (the recordings were made in 2019 at the American Academy of Arts and Letters in New York) and catch occasional breath and finger sounds but reveal these musicians' consistent sincerity of utterance and observance of Beethoven's detailed markings.

The 'Ghost' Trio opens proceedings and illustrates the group's strengths: unanimity of ensemble and clarity of line, Weiss's piano providing the propulsive power in faster music but all borne along upon the refined support of Stumpf's cello. Kaplan's violin tone is slender rather than refulgent; an occasional rasp and one or two untucked corners might have been smoothed over with an additional take or two but contribute to the vividness of the music making. The players seem happiest in livelier writing: the slow movement that gives the 'Ghost' its name lacks the gothic chill found by other groups. It's no surprise that the op.1 Trios, with their essentially 18th-century aesthetic, are among the highlights here, the C minor (no.3) especially gripping in its *Sturm und Drang* intensity. Lighter moments in the later works, such as the Scherzo of the 'Archduke', also come off well, and the two sets of variations are finely characterised. Turn, though, to the Vienna Piano Trio (Nimbus) in the First Trio's Adagio the better to hear the awed depths the young composer was capable of plumbing in more tender music.

Weiss, Kaplan and Stumpf save the best till last – the Trio op.70 no.2 – which so often seems to struggle to transcend the shadow of its more popular named neighbours. It sounds as if this is the piece these musicians have most enjoyed, their enthusiasm coming over in spades, bringing their sincere, spirited survey of this repertoire to a genial conclusion.

DAVID THREASHER

BERG String Quartet op.3

LIGETI String Quartet no.1 'Métamorphoses nocturnes'

SHOSTAKOVICH String Quartet no.7

Minetti Quartet

HÄNSSLER CLASSIC HC23060

Performances that combine immaculate technique with passion and insight

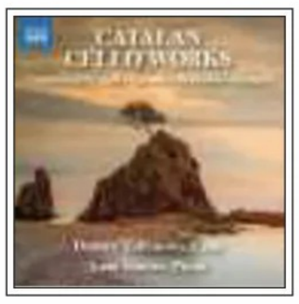
While the US-based Verona Quartet (reviewed on page 90) offers an all-Ligeti release, Vienna's Minetti Quartet opts for a more varied

To browse through more than a decade of *The Strad*'s recording reviews, visit **www.thestrad.com/reviews**

programme that culminates in the composer's very Bartókian First Quartet. In many ways, the two groups' approaches to the work are similarly clean, crisp and precise, though the Minetti probably has the edge in terms of extremity of emotion and piercing clarity. It's a performance of quite staggering insight and power, unfolding as a succession of tense build-ups and partial releases, never denying the composer's delightful, at times magical humour, yet adding a gurning grotesqueness in forceful projections of his more extreme sonic demands. It's as if the Minetti players step back from imposing an interpretation, focusing instead on delivering the detail of Ligeti's wild musical imaginings, and end up with an even more bristling, crackling account as a result.

The disc's earlier pieces are no less persuasive: there's a certain hard-edged drive to the Berg quartet, which serves to pick apart the piece's complex atonal counterpoint brilliantly, but it's combined with an expert sense of flux and flow in the work's hot-headed emotionalism. The Minetti is far cooler in Shostakovich's Seventh Quartet from 1960, at least in its clipped opening movement and ghostly second, though the players let rip in a furious finale that slumps resignedly into a movingly hushed conclusion. The musicians are captured in clear, warm sound.

DAVID KETTLE



CATALAN CELLO WORKS

CASABLANCAS Cant per Frederic Mompou 'Remembrança' **CASALS** Romanza; Full d'album; Rêverie **CASSADÓ** Requiebros; Sonata nello stile antico spagnuolo **GRANADOS** Madrigal; Quejas o la maja y el ruiseñor (arr.Marshall); Intermezzo (arr.Cassadó); Danza gallega **MOMPOU** La Filla del carmesí (arr.Cassadó)

Dmitry Yablonsky (cello)
Laia Martín (piano)

NAXOS 8.579097

High drama from the Minetti Quartet

JULIA WESELY

A Catalan tradition is brought to life by engaging performances

A festival of both dramatic and reflective Catalan melodies sung out with elegance by Dmitry Yablonsky and Laia Martín characterises this warmly recorded release. Audiences traditionally love this music, not least the fiery *Requiebros* by cellist–composer Cassadó to which Yablonsky brings the right sort of bravura, mixed with nuanced expression in the more lyrical passages. You could certainly argue that both he and Casals forged a strong feeling for Catalan music through their performances, and, in particular, in the almost improvisatory-sounding cadenzas of Cassadó's powerfully folk-inflected works. This includes the rarely heard but finely crafted *Sonata nello stile antico spagnuolo* whose striking variation-form finale is given a compelling interpretation from this duo.

A more hard-edged style is explored in the gritty short piece *Remembrança* by Benet Casablancas, the sole contemporary figure here. This more acerbic language is rapidly dispelled though by the French-influenced attractive short pieces by Casals which are idiomatically written for the cello in a style that is reminiscent of Fauré. But the finest music in this programme undoubtedly comes from Granados, whose intensity of expression and quality of invention are simply more memorable, with soaring melodies in *Madrigal*, and a sense of theatre in the Intermezzo from *Goyescas*. Both artists, in this warm recording, depict and characterise this music with an instinctive understanding of its idiom.

JOANNE TALBOT

BRAHMS Piano Trio no.2 **COLL** Piano Trio **KORNGOLD** Piano Trio op.1

Trio Isimsiz

RUBICON RCD107

An adventurous programme draws fine playing from this rising trio

Trio Isimsiz's name comes from the Turkish for 'without name' or 'anonymous', which, on the strength of this third release on Rubicon, underlines that it's all about the music.

The programming is satisfying in itself, with Korngold – aged just twelve when writing his op.1 Trio – emerging out of the tradition of Brahms. In between, Spanish composer Francisco Coll's ear-beguiling, starkly inventive Piano Trio bursts in – just as Takemitsu complemented Brahms and Beethoven in Trio Isimisiz's preceding release.

There are robust strands of youthful joy and Viennese extravagance in the Korngold, the players shifting as one between scampering playfulness and warm lyricism in the middle two movements, always deeply committed but without exaggeration.

In the Brahms, too, the playing is never self-conscious or effortful, but surges freely in the weighty first movement, while the theme of the second-movement variations is one of many instances of the unanimity between violin and cello.

Coll's Piano Trio takes us to another world, teeming with rhythmic detail that the players duly translate into suppleness, and with seismic dynamic shifts that are absorbed as natural expression. It's a vivid testament to the group's considerable individual skills and collective power. The recording gloriously reflects these gifts, placing the players seamlessly in the Britten Studio acoustic, which itself becomes a fourth silent partner.

EDWARD BHESANIA

Stunning programming from Trio Isimsiz

LIGETI String Quartets: no.1 'Métamorphoses nocturnes', no.2; Andante and Allegro

Verona Quartet

DYNAMIC CDS8010

A complete survey of a Hungarian master proves patchy

What should be a revelatory cycle of the complete string quartet output of György Ligeti ends up being a strangely frustrating listen. Which is a shame, because this offering from the US-based Verona Quartet, currently ensemble-in-residence at Oberlin College, Ohio, starts off so well. The Verona players clearly know the Bartók-influenced First Quartet inside out, and their account is steely, passionate and projected with conviction and authority, from the brooding expectation of its tense opening to the grotesque 'Tempo di valse' and the hard-edged Presto and Prestissimo sections. It's a thrilling ride, quite clinically clean at times (like that of the Viennese Minetti Quartet, see page 88), but alert to Ligeti's unconventional demands, and showing off all four players' blisteringly impressive techniques.

In the far more avant-garde Second Quartet, however, the Verona sounds far less convincing. Dense, micropolyphonic textures come across as generic washes of sound, despite Ligeti's minutely detailed internal markings, and there are moments of questionable ensemble when the players emerge from fast and violent playing into soft stasis (there is one particularly noticeable example about halfway through the first movement). With uneven tremolos and wavering sustained notes, it's as if the blazing authority the Verona players displayed so confidently in the First Quartet has left them. The brief closing pieces – a tuneful, folksy 1950 Andante and

VERENA CHEN

CHANDOS
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STAY IN THE KNOW

CHANDOS
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CHAN 20274

New Release - Available Feb 16th

In their second recital for Chandos, Laura van der Heijden and Jâms Coleman present a captivating and eclectic programme built around the cello sonatas by Britten, Debussy, and Walker, interspersing them with shorter works by Lili Boulanger, Fauré, Korngold, Price, Nina Simone, and Takemitsu.

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STAY IN THE KNOW

Allegretto from Ligeti's years under socialist realism – are illuminating additions, given velvet-smooth performances, but show little of the irrepressible imagination of the composer's later music. Recorded sound is somewhat problematic too, with a background hum/hiss that comes and goes, and some distracting vocalisations picked up by the mics.

DAVID KETTLE

MOZART Violin Sonata no.32 K454; **PAGANINI** Caprice no.24 (arr. Elman); works by **Arensky, Beethoven, Braga, Cui, Drigo, Drdla, Elman, Gossec, Massenet, Offenbach** and **Riego**
Mischa Elman (violin) Jan Peerce (tenor) Risë Stevens (mezzo-soprano) Wolfgang Rosé and Brooks Smith (piano)

BIDDULPH 85037-2

A complete Mozart sonata and some characterful miniatures are highlights

In December 1948 Mischa Elman celebrated the 40th anniversary of his American debut and in April 1949 (Biddulph erroneously alleges 1951), RCA Victor made six of the recordings reissued here, with Wolfgang Rosé – nephew of Arnold – at the piano.

Gossec's Gavotte is quite fun (Busch in 1921 is even better) but Beethoven's Minuet is dreary and droopy – the melancholy is more suited to Cui's *Orientale*; the Serenades by Arensky and Drigo and Drdla's *Souvenir* are delightful.

From December 1950 come two sentimental but lovable songs with Jan Peerce, and the rest is from 1951, including Elman's only complete Mozart Sonata K454. Rosé's piano is well in the picture and Elman cannot resist expanding a little in the Largo; the Allegro is quite perky, as is the Allegretto finale. In between, Elman's phrasing flowers in the Andante. The E-string tone is a bit fierce but I enjoyed this performance.

Elman's arrangement of Paganini's Caprice no.24 is fairly forgettable. The piano, which has a brief introduction, gets in the way and Elman struggles in Variations 2 and 4; nos.3, 6 and the slashing 8 are good. In place of Variation 11 Elman writes four of his own, the second way out of style (Paganiniakov?) and a coda.

Duets in French with Risë Stevens – Offenbach's Barcarolle and Massenet's Élégie – are nice, as is Elman's second of three recordings of his own Tango. There is enough vintage Elman here to warrant a recommendation.

TULLY POTTER

NAPOLI!
Works by **Alborea, Barbella, Bonno, Corselli, Durante, Falconieri, Fiorenza, Lanzetti, Leo, Matteis I, Ortiz, Pergolesi, Porpora, Sarro** and **Scarlatti**
Ophélie Gaillard (cello, violoncello piccolo) Pulcinella Orchestra, Sandrine Piau (soprano) Marina Viotti (mezzo-soprano) Luan Góes (countertenor)

APARTÉ AP326 (2 CDS)

A southern Italian city provides ample inspiration for an eclectic programme

Following her explorations of music from Madrid, Berlin, Venice and London, Ophélie Gaillard presents a selection of excerpts and complete works by composers resident in Naples from the mid-16th to the late-18th centuries. Assisted in her research by Olivier Fourés, she often utilises a violoncello piccolo, most notably for the bel canto writing in Alessandro Scarlatti's Sonata no.1 and in the arranged Largo of Pergolesi's Violin Concerto in B flat major. She delivers the florid passagework and dexterous cross-string figuration of the fast movements of cello concertos by Fiorenza and Leo and Alborea's Sonata in D major with breathtaking virtuosity, produces a sonorous,

expressive cantabile in the slow 'Amoroso' movements and shapes phrases with the utmost musicality throughout. Her deft representations of musical characterisations of *commedia dell'arte* figures by Matteis I (*Scaramuccia*) and Barbella (*Sonata intitolata Arlecchino*…) likewise stand out. The album also features operatic excerpts, as well as both secular and religious items; some showcase Gaillard in prominent obbligato roles, commendably fulfilled.

Gaillard's determination to give her programming the utmost variety results in a somewhat fragmented collection overall, but her Naples-centric theme maintains a focus. Members of the Pulcinella Orchestra provide alert support, contribute solo roles as required and offer colourful continuo instrumentarium, extending even to percussion in some items (most surprisingly, the finale of Leo's concerto).

Captured in a church acoustic, the recording has ample bloom; however, a smoother transition between the two recorded movements of Durante's Second Concerto would have been desirable.

ROBIN STOWELL

NOSKOWSKI Violin Sonata in A minor
ŻELEŃSKI Violin Sonata in F major op.30
Laurence Kayaleh (violin)
Bernadene Blaha (piano)

NAXOS 8.574220

Stirring readings of violin sonatas by two Polish nationalist composers

These two Polish sonatas from the latter part of the 19th century are attractive, conservative in style, and well worth hearing. Zygmunt Noskowski's A minor Sonata of the mid-1870s is brimming with melody and hints of Brahms. It opens with a somewhat severe dialogue before opening out into free-flowing

Colour aplenty from Capella Jenensis

lyricism, opulent and alluring, played by Laurence Kayaleh with full-toned warmth and fluency, with the pianist Bernadene Blaha often in busy attendance. The melodies continue to flow as the development becomes increasingly impassioned. Along the way Kayaleh produces some nicely turned moments of quiet questioning. The second movement is a set of variations on a genial, occasionally pensive, theme; as the variations progress Kayaleh is by turns light and sinuous, or tender and shapely, with a gentle, autumnal beauty to round them off. The final Prestissimo is a staccato dash in the nature of a tarantella, with both players exhibiting plenty of rhythmic energy.

In the first movement of Władysław Żeleński's slightly later F major Sonata, Kayaleh deals elegantly with some nifty runs and double stops, with Blaha always excellent in the demanding piano writing. The central Allegretto has graceful playing of deceptive simplicity. The nearest the sonata gets to a slow movement is the Molto sostenuto opening of the finale, with Kayaleh sensitively outlining its twisting contours, before his ebullient playing of the Allegro. The recorded sound is resonant, with the piano sometimes sounding a little boxy.

TIM HOMFRAY

OSWALD Sonatas
Capella Jenensis
CPO 555478-2

Innovative sonatas from the byways of 17th-century Germany

In its endeavours to rediscover and promote the rich Thuringian musical heritage, Capella Jenensis gives persuasive performances of 12 of the 18 surviving sonatas for two to four soloists and continuo by Andreas Oswald (1634–65). These progressive works comprise various short sections, some of which verge on the bizarre; especially notable are the Sonata à violino solo in E minor, expressively dispatched by violinist Claudia Mende, and the Sonata à 2 in A minor, in which violinist Alfia Bakieva nurtures its chromatic harmonies and eloquently negotiates its contrasting tempos and affects.

There is virtuoso dialogue and fantasy a-plenty, not only from the string players but also from Carl-Philipp Kaptain (sackbut) and Claudius Kamp (dulcian), whose beguiling contributions include quasi-martial motifs, as in the Sonata à 3 in F major's Allegro sections and near the end of the Sonata à 3 in C major. Folk elements also abound, notably in numerous dance-influenced sections and in the use of scordatura violin in the Sonata ò verò Aria à 2.

Continuo support, shared appropriately between organ, harpsichord, theorbo, Baroque guitar and violone, adds to the kaleidoscope of instrumental colours, Petra Burmann's guitar especially providing rhythmic impetus in the Sonata à 3 in D. Despite the generous acoustic, Gertrude Ohse's gamba is too often overwhelmed in the balance.

ROBIN STOWELL

TCHAIKOVSKY Piano Trio in A minor
Kirill Troussov (violin) Benedict Kloeckner (cello) Alexandra Troussova (piano)
ORCHID CLASSICS ORC100259

A Russian masterpiece inspires a performance high on emotion

With no companion piece for Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio, this recording is less than generous in length, but it compensates with playing of sweeping grandeur. At its height the first movement has symphonic richness and tonal depth, which are balanced by gentle, touching pathos and moments of expressive, tragic reflection from the string players, with their fervent vibrato complemented by the close, reverberant recording. The ending is a sad, relentless trudge.

The theme of the second movement is given with a slight hiatus before each dotted minim, which gets a bit predictable, but as the musicians move through the variations they encompass a kaleidoscope of colour and character. Violinist Kirill Troussov produces nicely flibbertigibbet semiquavers over cellist Benedict Kloeckner's melody in the second variation, and Slavic passion in the fourth, his bow

COURTESY CAPELLA JENENSIS

biting into the string. Alexandra Troussova twinkles nicely in the fifth variation, sounding almost like a toy piano, before the players raise the musical temperature in the sixth-variation waltz, with Kloeckner urbane in the opening melody and both strings in light, capricious dialogue before their muscular reminiscence of the theme. There is robust playing in the fugal eighth variation, with crisp staccatos and heightened accents. The tenth variation mazurka dances as it should, and the eleventh dies away to nothing, before the grand final variation and coda, full of sound and fury.

TIM HOMFRAY

NIKOLAI TCHEREPNIN String Quartet in A minor op.11 **ALEXANDER TCHEREPNIN** String Quartet no.1 op.36, String Quartet no.2 op.40, Piano Quintet in G major op.44 **IVAN TCHEREPNIN** There was no wind
Siobhan Stagg (soprano)
Giuseppe Mentuccia (piano)
Michelangelo Quartet
CAPRICCIO C5503 (2 CDS)

Keeping it in the family: an exploration of a Russian musical dynasty

The Tcherepnin dynasty covered an amazingly wide musical spectrum in the course of three generations. A student of Rimsky-Korsakov, Nikolai left a distinctive mark on Russian musical life in the years preceding the Bolshevik Revolution. His only String Quartet shows his teacher's influence in its sophisticated formal scheme but also a melodic gift redolent of Borodin at his most sensuous. Nikolai's son Alexander came of age after the family had settled in Paris following some years spent in Tbilisi, an experience that provided him with ideas for unusual scales and harmonies based on Georgian modes. These are most evident in his Second String Quartet. Its predecessor, subtitled 'Love Offering to St Theresa of the Child Jesus', employs archaic melodic cells to evoke the world of the Carmelite nun, who was canonised in the 1920s. The Piano Quintet combines the composer's idiosyncratic idiom with dogged ostinato rhythms, the piano's percussive qualities effectively set off against the strings.

We come full circle with the last composition of Alexander's son Ivan, written as a homage to the publisher Belyayev, with whom his grandfather had collaborated a century earlier. It is based on Russian folk songs, which Ivan illustrates with beautifully descriptive colours and textures. While Nikolai's over-the-top effusions might have benefited from more hedonistic abandon, the Michelangelo Quartet sounds as comfortable and idiomatic with Ivan's Impressionistic shadings as with Alexander's angular melodies and rhythmic idiosyncracies. Faithfully recorded in a favourable acoustic, the group makes a forcefully convincing case for music that definitely deserves it.

CARLOS MARÍA SOLARE

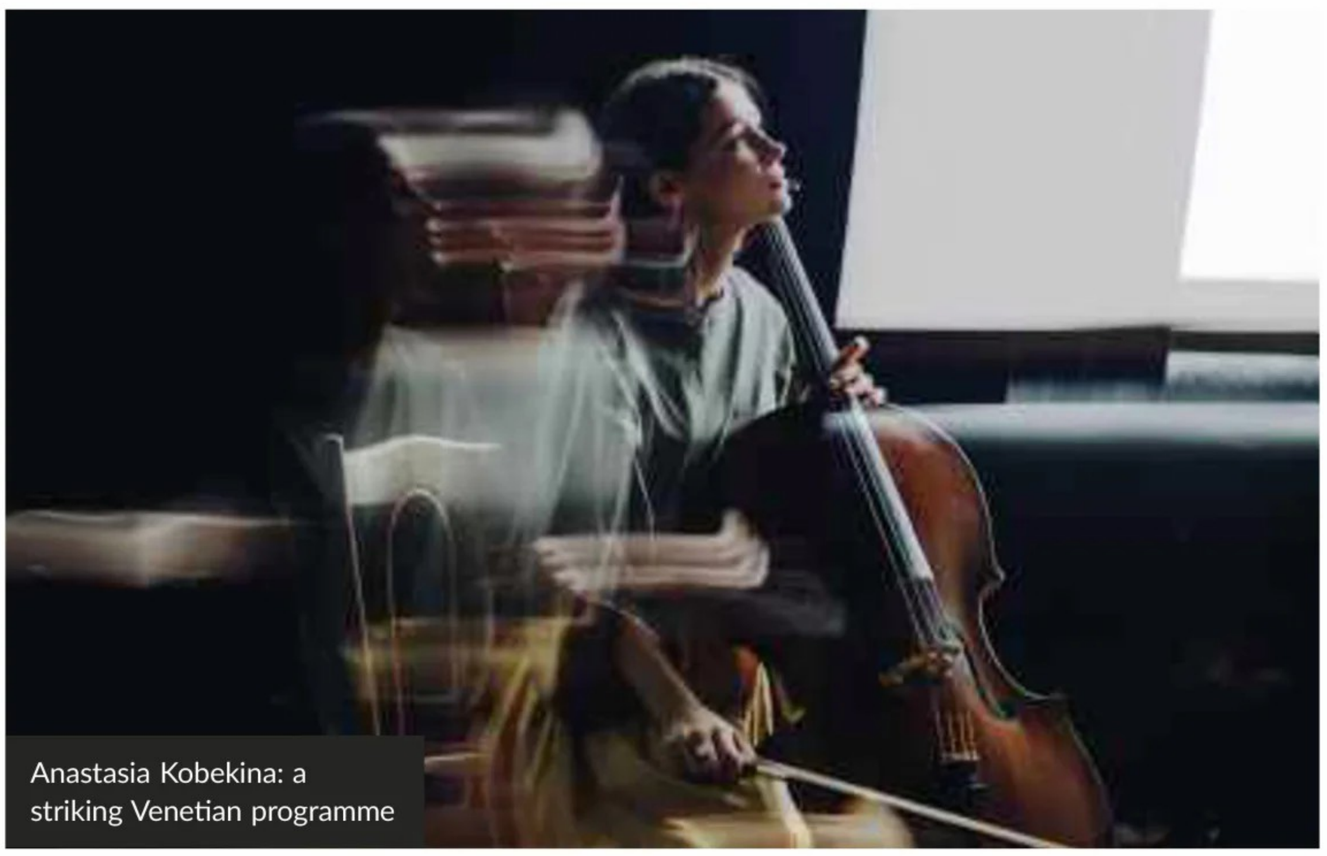
VENICE

VIVALDI Cello Concertos: D minor RV405, G minor RV416; movements from RV408, 409, 419; works by **Bach (after Marcello), Britten, Dowland, Eno, Fauré, Kobekin, Kurtág, Monteverdi, Rota, Sartorio, Shaw, Silvestrov** and **Strozzi**
Anastasia Kobekina (cello)
Azul Lima (theorbo) Basel Chamber Orchestra/Julia Schröder
SONY CLASSICAL 19658828072

Venice offers depths of inspiration in a memorable debut

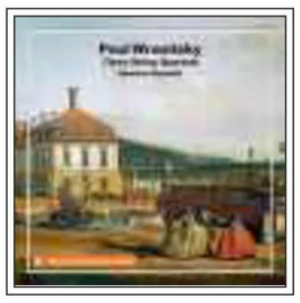
Everyone has their own impressions of Venice. Those of the young Russian cellist Anastasia Kobekina, which inspired her Sony debut album, appear to centre more around dark lapping water and sinister shadows than colourful masked balls.

A glance at the featured composers demonstrates the diversity of Kobekina's programming. Bookended by Monteverdi's *Arianna's Lament*, in its original version and then as reimagined by her father Vladimir Kobekin, this is a sequence of music that cannot fail to haunt you, performed with infectious



Anastasia Kobekina: a striking Venetian programme

XENIA ZASETSKA



spontaneity and recorded with an intimate clarity.

Vivaldi, one of Venice's most famous sons, has a major role: two complete cello concertos, plus single movements of others. This is wild (rather than sedate) Vivaldi – you almost imagine the orchestral players slapping their instruments and can practically see Kobekina's fingers flying over the strings of her 1698 Stradivari cello. The mannered style with which she treats the solo part, milking the drama, may not be to everyone's taste, but it certainly packs a punch.

Interesting textures abound – cello and theorbo for Brian Eno's *Emerald and Stone*, beautiful in its restrained simplicity, cello and viola in Caroline Shaw's magnetic and highly individual *Limestone and Felt*, solo cello in the brief but hugely atmospheric 'Shadows' from Kurtág's *Signs, Games and Messages* and Britten's Barcarola (from his Third Cello Suite), with its slightly sinister sul ponticello. This is altogether a striking disc.

JANET BANKS

WRANITZKY String Quartets: op.2 no.2, op.32 no.4, op.49

Almaviva Quartet

CPO 555466-2

Persuasive advocacy brings a neglected Viennese figure to life

An exact but longer-lived Viennese contemporary of Mozart, Paul Wranitzky followed Haydn into the service of the Esterházy family and produced music with comparable fluency: 11 operas, 24 symphonies and 54 string quartets await discovery.

That most of them remain unrecorded counts as a minor injustice on the strength of this trio of quartets. The three-movement form is archaic even for the time, and the otherwise first-rate booklet essay does not speculate why Wranitzky omitted a minuet. Even in the earliest of them, G major pleasantries are tempered by a pronounced minor-key tendency. The first violin's dominance is checked by the Almaviva's open-textured playing and a generously bass-weighted studio ambience.

By 1798, the date of the G major Quartet op.32 no.4, Wranitzky had embraced a more intricate style of quartet writing but still not the sonata-form design that underpins the works of his great contemporaries. The Almaviva brings a rambling first movement to life with pertinently rhetorical gestures before investing the central variation-form Adagio with near-Haydnesque pathos.

Even so, it is op.49, Wranitzky's last quartet, that rewards real attention and repeated listening. The year is 1804 and it is cast in a turbulent D minor, and a world recognisable from Beethoven's works on the cusp of his 'middle' period. It's no 'Rasumovsky', but the Almaviva players give it every chance with a collectively sweet tone, grainy phrasing and strong rhythmic profile.

PETER QUANTRILL

PRIMAVERA IV: THE HEART

Works by **Arad, Braden, Chen, Current, Getty, Ho, Kernis, Llugdar, Moravec, Mazurek, Okoye, Sorey** and **Young**

Matt Haimovitz (cello)

PENTATONE PTC5187113

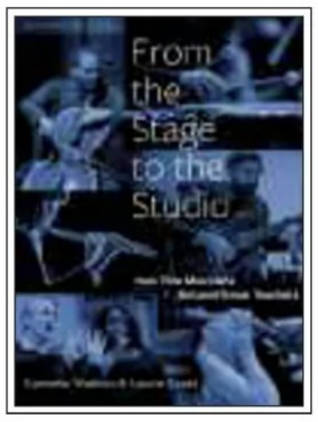
The fourth leg in this enterprising journey proves as scintillating as the previous three

It was back in the summer of 2021 that Israeli-born, US-based cellist Matt Haimovitz released the first volume in his projected six-part Primavera series, comprising no fewer than 81 new commissions for solo cello, inspired both by Botticelli's eponymous 15th-century painting and German-born artist Charline von Heyl's contemporary response in her *Primavera 2020*.

We reach volume 4 in this latest release, 'the heart', and the focus for its 13 new works narrows slightly to figures and themes in the paintings themselves, including three pieces inspired by the Graces. Haimovitz attacks Tyshawn Sorey's *Three Graces* with aggressive vigour, grappling with the composer's jagged lines and sudden shifts in direction, though it's his darkly lyrical moments of reflection that are most memorable. He delivers a carefully nuanced reading of Aaron Jay Kernis's sarabande-inspired *Grace*, and deftly combines arco and pizzicato in the dance turmoil of Justine F. Chen's Graces-inspired *Iridescent Gest*. Elsewhere, Brian Current imagines vines growing from the nymphs' bodies in the scurrying extended techniques of his alienating but seductive *Chlorisflora*, while Haimovitz responds to the beautiful baritone melody of Nkeiru Okoye's lyrical *Breaking Bread* with engaging freedom, almost wallowing in the composer's charm and elegance.

There's a lot to take in, but what makes Haimovitz's ongoing collection more than simply a compendium of contemporary music styles and techniques is his own compelling playing, shot through with conviction and idiomatic insight, however extreme the demands of a piece may be. Like previous offerings in the series, *Primavera IV* is a cleverly curated collection, charting a music journey full of contrasts and surprises, but one with a clear sense of direction and purpose.

DAVID KETTLE



From the Stage to the Studio: How Fine Musicians Become Great Teachers (Second edition)
Cornelia Watkins, Laurie Scott
336PP ISBN 9780197578667
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS £81

When the first edition of *From Stage to Studio* was published in 2012, it was to a hugely positive critical reaction from pedagogues and performers alike, inviting phrases such as 'I am stunned, amazed and forever grateful' (Richard Stoltzman), 'an essential keystone' (Eric Booth) and 'invaluable' (Barry Green).

At that time, the foreword by Stephen Clapp referenced the more than 60 years of combined experience Watkins and Scott had brought to the work. Now, with this welcome second edition, that figure rises to over 80, and the generosity and wisdom that suffused the first book is enhanced in the process.

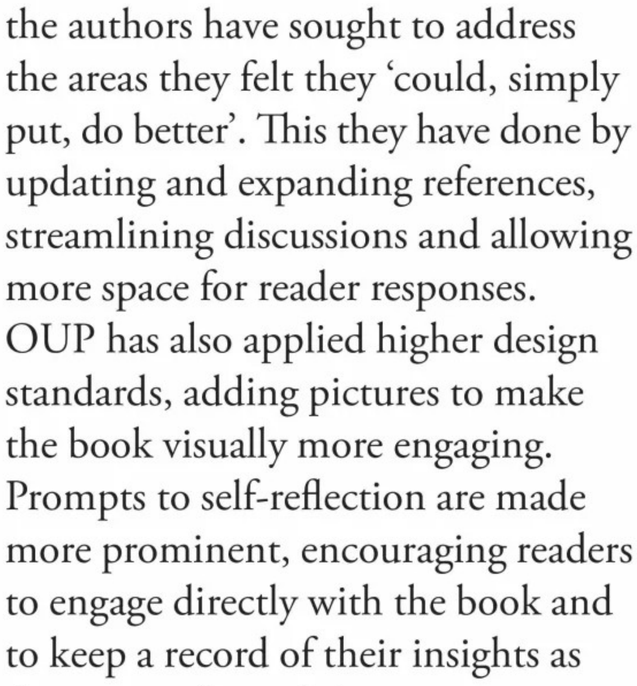
The central premises of the book – to identify the areas of congruence between artistry in musical performance and teaching excellence, and to build strong bridges between them by offering impassioned yet concrete and pragmatic advice – remain unchanged, the decade that has passed since the first edition in no way dimming the power and value of its original message.

In a world in which instrumental teachers can have a very hit-and-miss experience as they feel their way into the profession, this book is like a torch beam, highlighting the path to a world of generative and creative instrumental teaching. It is the kind that learners and teachers will alike find affirming, and will enjoy, and one that considers both as whole human beings with histories, preferences, failings and foibles, looking to enjoy together a lifetime in music. Though the advice the authors offer is designed to make musician teachers feel better about themselves, it is not done in a facile, self-comforting way, but one that encourages us all to appreciate what we uniquely bring, and to draw wisdom from within ourselves that we did not know was there.

In this second edition, with the benefit of further reflection, feedback and active use of the book with others, the authors have sought to address the areas they felt they 'could, simply put, do better'. This they have done by updating and expanding references, streamlining discussions and allowing more space for reader responses. OUP has also applied higher design standards, adding pictures to make the book visually more engaging. Prompts to self-reflection are made more prominent, encouraging readers to engage directly with the book and to keep a record of their insights as they move through it.

The introduction ends with a quote from pianist Karl Paulnack, who said, in a welcome address to Boston Conservatory music students: 'You're here to become a sort of therapist for the human soul, a spiritual version of a chiropractor, physical therapist, someone who works with our insides to see if they get things to line up, to see if we can come into harmony with ourselves and be healthy and happy and well.' Not a bad mantra for those who choose the profession of music educator either.

PHILIPPA BUNTING



Teaching cello fingerings

GETTY/MONKEYBUSINESSIMAGES

Liuteria Romagnola
Violin Making in Romagna: Masters, disciples and followers in the second half of the 20th century
Leonardo Cella
124PP LIUTERIAROMAGNOLA.IT
EDIZIONI BELLAROSA €250

Over the past few decades, research into 19th- and 20th-century Italian lutherie has shown that its appeal lies more in its regional diversity than in its adherence to the classical Cremonese violin making style. This new volume continues this approach by examining a school that has until now been mostly forgotten, or merged within the wider field of Emilia-Romagna violin making. However, the region of Romagna (the territory south of Bologna) shows specific trends and a taste that evolved independently from what was happening in the main city of the region, and therefore deserves more attention.

The author, the young violinist and researcher Leonardo Cella, is clearly in love with his subject. A native of Pesaro, not far from the southern border of the region, he is thus an 'adoptive son' of Romagna,

and his interest grew from meeting some of the luthiers who were active there in the second half of the 20th century. These make up the focus of this volume.

The book opens with an inspired account of Cella's fascination for this territory. He then differentiates between the 'masters, disciples and followers' active in the region. In the first category, he includes four makers well known to the wider audience: Marino Capicchioni in Rimini and Arturo Fracassi in Cesena; then the perhaps slightly more neglected character of Primo Contavalli in Imola, and Giuseppe Lucci, a native of Bagnacavallo. This is a small town that used to be one of the centres of Italian violin making, for decades hosting a national competition under the auspices of Lucci himself.

All of these makers were mostly self-taught, as were the vast majority of the lesser-known names that form the subsequent section of the volume, a dictionary of instrument makers from Romagna that extends from the end of the 19th century to the present day. In some cases both these masters and their followers show interesting connections to other contemporary Italian makers, such as the Pollastri family in Bologna, the Bisiach family in Milan, and Simone Fernando Sacconi, among others.

The photographic section of the book focuses only on the luthiers active around or after the mid-20th century, grouped according to the leading makers listed above; the connections between them rarely involve a master–pupil relationship, and are mostly indirect connections. This makes the style of the 'followers' less distinctly adherent or influenced by the 'masters' but on the other hand is the reason for the naivety and spontaneity of their work. The illustrations are of fine quality, and all the violins, including those made by the lesser-known makers, are reproduced full-size. These are rarely encountered either on the market or in the auction sales, so the book will be a useful reference to their work for enthusiasts and collectors.

ANDREA ZANRÈ

A 1983 violin by Romano Comastri

LEONARDO CELLA

Stringstastic: Double Bass
Lorraine Chai

LEVEL 1: 52PP ISBN 9780645267082
LEVEL 2: 52PP ISBN 9780645267099
QUIET LIFE MUSIC

Stringstastic is a collection of instrument-specific theory books by Lorraine Chai, aimed at ages 6–10. Completing the string series are the newly published double bass books, for which Chai has been aided by two renowned bass players, Barry Green and Claus Freudenstein. Both the Level 1 and Level 2 books successfully bridge the gap between complete beginners to ABRSM Grade 1 theory, and would suit a group learning environment as well as individual lessons.

Book 1 follows the young bass player from their very first lesson through to an Initial grade level of playing, while Book 2 continues on to an approximate Grade 2–3 level. Both are clearly laid out with colourful illustrations. Opportunities for creativity are plentiful, including drawing a double bass and composing simple tunes using open strings.

I enjoyed the storytelling aspect of the books, and how they were linked to the student's own practice. Animal characters guide students through each book, giving helpful tips including visualising the notes on their fingerboard, with opportunities to learn theory through playing the notes, scales or articulations on their instrument, something rarely found in other theory books. There is a test at the end of each volume, and a revision chapter at the beginning and in the middle of the Level 2 book. In addition, printable flashcards and more worksheets are available on the website www.stringstastic.com

It is always going to be a challenge to incorporate different teaching methods of learning and practice into a theory book, and while some different options are identified – such as showing the differences between playing French and German bow, and between sitting and standing – there are some technical explanations and approaches that not all teachers will agree with. These include the use of stickers on the instrument, how to shift and pivot, and certain fingerings and finger patterns for scales. While the C, G and E major scales are taught, D and A major are neglected, which is perhaps a missed opportunity.

It is great to see a theory book for the double bass, and these books are a welcome addition to pair alongside the student's repertoire.

ELOISE RIDDELL

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90 YEARS AGO

From the ARCHIVE

FROM THE STRAD FEBRUARY 1934 VOL.64 NO.526

The Strad's Egyptian correspondent Alexander Ruppa gives an account of two (not entirely successful) performances by violinist Bronisław Huberman

Bronislaw Huberman, the world-famous violinist, is again among us in Egypt, and played twice to the Alexandria and Cairo public with conspicuous success. It is somewhat hard to find among our international celebrities a violinist whose musicianship and dynamic personality are so striking. To speak in absolute terms, it is a fact that Huberman is more of a musician than a violinist. If you are a violinist yourself, you will be surely amazed at the transcendental technique of Kubelik, Heifetz and Prihoda, which is in a class by itself – and forget all about it the next morning. While the technical attainments of Huberman cannot bear comparison to those of these three giants, his compelling artistic personality grips your soul from the very moment he sets his bow across the strings and keeps you enthralled right to the last note and for a long time after.

I heard Huberman for the first time on February 17th, 1910, here in Alexandria, and it was the very first time he was playing in Egypt. Huberman appealed to me then, as he appeals to me now, after the lapse of nearly a quarter of a century, by his warm earnestness and the pathos of his emotional depth which radiate from him. It must, however, be reluctantly admitted that Huberman's technique is no longer what it was in 1910. The violinist's temperament, which has always been a passionate one, has now grown somewhat "nervy," and this is adversely reflected in his playing. In the present instance he was playing on the well-known Joseph Guarnerius del Gesu, ex Alfred Gibson, dated 1734. This instrument has a lovely one-piece back of beautifully figured maple. Its tone is "aggressively" Guarnerian, very powerful and incisive, with a metallic shade, which was further stressed by Huberman's virile and unrestrained playing. In fact that distinctly metallic tinge was, in my opinion, anything but pleasant to a refined ear, and clearly recalled to my mind a similarity in the tone of the E string of Marteau's famous Maggini, which formerly belonged to the Empress Maria-Theresa of Austria. An aggravating circumstance in this case was that the G string of the Guarnerius was too low and invariably clattered against the fingerboard whenever it was subjected to a slashing stroke of the bow. It seems to me that such trivial defects could be easily remedied in good time instead of giving rise to criticism and marring the playing of a great artist. When all is said and done, it is obvious that Huberman's present style of playing would have improved had he used a less pungent and assertive instrument than a Guarnerius del Gesu. ●

THE STRAD

A Monthly Journal for Professionals and Amateurs of all Stringed Instruments Played with the Bow.

L. P. BALMFORTH & SON

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SUXIAO YANG

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Augustin Hadelich
The German violinist, with a raft of engagements this season, discusses the process of honing his highly individual sound

Pierre Rode
To mark the 250th anniversary of the violinist and composer's birth, we discover why there was more to him than his 24 Caprices

Otto Schünemann
Successful in his day, the 19th-century German luthier opened his own school of violin making in Schwerin

Laurence Lesser
The 85-year-old cello pedagogue shares his memories of great cellists such as Pablo Casals and Gregor Piatigorsky

Double bass set-up
Arnold Schnitzer gives some top tips, designed for use by luthiers and 'handy' double bassists

PLUS

Postcard from Beijing
The Global Music Education League violin competition

Trade Secrets
Petko Petkov's method for repairing a cello neck heel

Sentimental *Work*

EDWARD DUSINBERRE

Beethoven's String Quartet no.8 has been a life companion for the British musician, over more than three decades as the Takács Quartet's first violinist

There are some pieces of music that accompany you throughout your musical life: they rearrange themselves in your head and you find new facets within them as you evolve as a musician. Beethoven's String Quartet no.8 in E minor is a piece that never grows old for me, and I feel there's always something more to be discovered in it. And in my 31 years as first violinist of the Takács Quartet it's reflected so many of the changes we've gone through as an ensemble.

The first time I remember it making an impact on me was when my parents took me to hear a performance by the Allegri Quartet in Cambridge. I was around 13 and I can still remember the slow movement, when first violinist Peter Carter climbed up and up the scale, crested twice and came down to an underlying chord. Until then I hadn't realised the ethereal potential of the instrument, as he played it with such serenity and wonder. I also remember talking about the piece with my mother, a keen amateur violinist who played it with her friends, and how she highlighted the descant passage of the second movement as one of her favourites.

Later on, I heard the Alberni Quartet perform it, while I was studying with its first violinist Howard Davis. The players' agility amazed me, especially the skill with which they passed the lines between them, and the scurrying, breathless quality of that first movement. Howard always had a huge amount of positive energy and when I said how hard the piece sounded, he laughed and said how lucky we were that we had such great music to perform! To be honest, I felt daunted by the piece, and didn't seriously try playing it until I'd joined the Takács, while in my last year at Juilliard.

At that time, I read as much as I could about the piece and how it was written. I learnt how Count Rasumovsky – like my mother, an amateur player – had commissioned it from Beethoven, and not long after trying to play it (and the other two 'Rasumovsky' quartets) decided just to be a listener instead! And when one violinist declared that the quartets were 'not music', Beethoven replied, 'They are not for you, but for a later age.' So here I was, in that 'later age' and I had to play them!

This was the last piece I played with the Takács founder violist Gábor Ormai, who left just a year after I'd joined; he died of cancer six months afterwards, and I still associate the piece with that sad, difficult time for us all. Then we were joined by violist Roger Tapping, formerly of the Allegri, though not at the time I'd heard them in Cambridge. He brought a real sense of the quartet's harmonic underpinnings and brought a tremendous sense of exploration to our rehearsals. When he retired in 2005 he was followed by Geraldine Walther, who came from an orchestral background and brought a real sense of fun to playing quartets. Finally, Richard O'Neill joined in 2020 and the piece evolved again: when my mother heard it up in Cambridge, she remarked on how dramatic it sounded, particularly the startling chords and intimate silences of the first movement. Looking back to those first audiences who didn't like the piece, I think there's still something so disruptive and radical about this music that retains the ability to shock.

We're now performing the quartet with a new commission by Nokuthula Ngwenyama called *Flow*, in a programme based around the natural world. We open with Haydn's 'Sunrise' quartet, which contrasts with the second movement of the Beethoven, and which was apparently inspired by the night-time stars and the 'music of the spheres'. It's a gorgeous piece, quite difficult to pace, and the best way to find your way into it is to hold on to that unique sense of wonder and sweetness embodied within it. ●

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN LLOYD

Dusinberre (*left*) with the Takács: 'There's always something more to be discovered in this quartet.'

TOP PHOTO AMANDA TIPTON. MAIN PHOTO IAN MALKIN

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QUATUOR TCHALIK

The award-winning Quatuor Tchalik stands out for a multitude of reasons, and among them is the fact that its members are siblings. Gabriel, Louise, Sarah and Marc Tchalik have been making music together since their earliest childhood.

They are also all very attached to the great outdoors. As children, they would often retreat to the forest near their home to practice their instruments, especially in the hot summer months. Visits to their grandparents meant long walks in the nearby Pyrénées Mountains. They have even performed in the Alps, including a concert at an altitude of 2,000 metres.

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